

“A NEW TEACHING-WITH AUTHORITY!”: EVANGELICAL TRADITIONING  
AND THE CHALLENGES TO THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY

BY

NATHAN DANIEL RAYBECK

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Pradeep Dhillon, Chair  
Associate Professor Richard A. Layton  
Professor Robert McKim  
Professor Wayne Pitard

### **Abstract**

This study examines the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an expression of evangelical traditioning and Bibliology. It raises the question of whether or not inerrancy can serve as a pedagogically responsible foundation for evangelical traditioning and Bibliology by asking two questions. Firstly, is inerrancy a barrier to theological growth? And secondly, is inerrancy intellectually honest? In answering these aforementioned questions, the dissertation examines the so-called Peter Enns controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary, contrasting an Ennsian approach as outlined in his *Inspiration and Incarnation* with an inerrantist approach as articulated in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

The study argues that the doctrine of inerrancy is an improper foundation for both evangelical traditioning and Bibliology because the doctrine both quells an individual's potential for theological growth and is intellectually dishonest when confronted with the challenges presented by modern biblical scholarship.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, few debates have been as prominent or as publicized within evangelical theology as the debate over biblical inerrancy.<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-1970s, numerous texts have been published on the subject of inerrancy.<sup>2</sup> While debates over the inspiration<sup>3</sup> of Scripture are not new to evangelicalism, some evangelical

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<sup>1</sup> In their introductory *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy place the “Inerrancy Debate” as the first in a series of seventeen theological debates within the evangelical faith, noting that the doctrines they are addressing “are not considered in terms of their historic or existential importance to the evangelical faith but strictly in terms of the differing interpretations contemporary evangelicals have of these doctrines.” The fact that Boyd and Eddy place the inerrancy debate before the Calvinist-Arminian debates over free will and God’s foreknowledge, and even before the Genesis debate concerning creation, gives a clear indication of the widely divergent nature of the inerrancy debate within evangelicalism. What is important here, though, is the stress that some within the evangelical community place on this debate in terms of defining who an evangelical really is. See Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 12. It should also be noted that the terms “Scripture” and “the Bible” will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Either term is meant to refer to the sixty-six canonical books gathered into the Protestant Christian Bible, as listed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. (WCF 1:2)

<sup>2</sup> For book-length treatments of the inerrancy debate within evangelicalism since 1976, see Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976); Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980); Robert P. Lightner, *A Biblical Case for Total Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1978); *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987); Harvie M. Conn, ed. *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (1988; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990); Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict* and *The Great Evangelical Disaster* in Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), vol.2, chap. 2, vol.4, chap. 5; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982); Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* rev. ed. (1998; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984); D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (1983; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992); Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2006); Andreas J. Köstenberger, ed., *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007); R.C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1996); Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *Evangelicals & Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, rev. ed. (1980; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999); A.T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Stephen J. Nichols and Eric T. Brandt, *Ancient word, Changing Worlds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009); and G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> In terms of a short definition of inspiration, Clark H. Pinnock offers a good example of what is meant by “inspiration” here when he writes, “It is probably best to think of *inspiration* as a divine activity accompanying the preparation and production of the Scriptures” (my emphasis). The relationship between

scholars worry that there is an increasing “erosion” of the commitment to inerrancy within evangelical circles.<sup>4</sup> For these scholars, the cause of this chipping away of the bedrock of evangelicalism is the slow but steady acceptance of critical biblical scholarship by evangelical biblical scholars and theologians.<sup>5</sup> For example, G.K. Beale has recognized that the reason for this movement is twofold: (i) postmodernism and its assailing of the propositional claims of the Bible, and (ii) the rise of conservative evangelicals who are not only attending non-evangelical graduate schools for biblical and theological study but also assimilating “*to one degree or another non-evangelical perspectives, especially with regard to higher critical views of the authorship, dating, and historical claims of the Bible.*”<sup>6</sup> In short, scholars like Beale view the principal challenge to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy to be a recent movement that seeks a fundamental shift in the understanding of evangelical Bibliology.<sup>7</sup>

According to Beale, this shift has been caused by the rising infiltration of critical biblical scholarship—scholarship from outside the canons of faith—into evangelical

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inerrancy and inspiration and a much more detailed definition of inspiration will be fleshed out in §1.2; for now, though, I will simply say that inspiration should be thought of as the process through which Scripture is understood to be the word of God. See Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2006), 90.

<sup>4</sup> For example, G.K. Beale states that “There is afoot an attempt to redefine what is an ‘evangelical view of scriptural authority,’” a view that, according to Beale, is found most saliently articulated in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978). See Beale, *Erosion*, 19. It is also important to note that the waning of a commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture is not a novel theme in evangelical theology. See specifically Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> While some might claim that an important distinction exists between critical biblical scholarship and so-called “believer’s” criticism, it is unclear just what the difference is between the two forms of scholarship. Rather, the difference seems to be solely in the presumed epistemology of the individuals engaging in scholarship, not in the scholarship itself. (Dhillon suggests clarifying this and then putting it in the text itself.

<sup>6</sup> See Beale, *Erosion*, 20, my emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Bibliology simply refers to the study of the theological doctrine of Scripture. Specifically for my purposes though, it concerns the relationship between the Divine and human elements simultaneously at work in Scripture.

theology. For scholars like Beale, this new understanding of evangelical Bibliology fundamentally undermines what they see as evangelicalism's historic commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy. While this new evangelical Bibliology views *inerrancy* as “‘fundamentalist baggage,’ with all the negative associations that go with the word *fundamentalism*,”<sup>8</sup> Beale and other traditional scholars consider inerrancy to be the best expression of a distinctly evangelical Bibliology.<sup>9</sup> Because of their commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy, I will refer to Beale and other traditional evangelical scholars simply as inerrantists.

The creeping force of this new Bibliology and the question over the doctrine of inerrancy has resulted in everything from heated exchanges at theological conferences, protests and walkouts from seminary classrooms, and forced resignations of scholars from professional organizations and institutions of higher education.<sup>10</sup> The reason for such intense reactions surrounding the question of inerrancy has to do with the fact that, for inerrantists, casting aside the doctrine of inerrancy is tantamount to forsaking the authority of Scripture, and by extension the very truthfulness of God as expressed through His incarnate word. Therefore, for inerrantists, rejecting inerrancy is nothing short of denying the veracity of God, and such a dire result is exactly what they foresee if

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<sup>8</sup> Beale, *Erosion*, 21 (author's emphasis)

<sup>9</sup> e.g. D.A. Carson, John Woodbridge, Paul Helm, J.I. Packer, Carl Trueman, Jeffrey Jue, Peter Lillaback, and Vern Poythress just to name a few.

<sup>10</sup> Recent examples include President John H. Tretijen's suspension from Concordia Seminary St. Louis in 1974 over the teaching of higher criticism within the seminary; the Evangelical Theological Society's (ETS) forced resignation of Robert H. Gundry in 1983 for his work on Matthew; Peter Enns' forced separation from Westminster Theological Seminary in 2008 over issues of his use and call for more engagement with higher criticism; Bruce Waltke's registration from Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in 2009 over questions of the nature of evolution; and Tremper Longman III "disinvitation" to continue adjunct teaching at RTS in 2009 over his questions concerning the historicity of the biblical Adam.

this new evangelical Bibliology, thoroughly inculcated with the spirit of critical scholarship, should take hold.

However, for inerrantists, inerrancy is not only a bedrock principle for evangelical Bibliology, it is also what makes evangelicalism, well, evangelical. For example, in his *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Francis Schaeffer writes, “evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture [affirm the inerrancy of Scripture] and those who do not.”<sup>11</sup> Not only does the doctrine of inerrancy safeguard the integrity of God’s word, it also serves as a hallmark of the evangelical identity for Schaeffer and others.<sup>12</sup> Since for the inerrantist, inerrancy serves as a constituent element of the evangelical identity, it makes sense then to argue vociferously against those who in the name of a new evangelical Bibliology wish to cast off what essentially makes evangelicalism evangelical.

Questions of Bibliology, consequently, are not the only questions being raised in the debate over inerrancy. Also being questioned is what the future of the evangelical identity is to look like. In this sense then, the question is no longer has the doctrine of inerrancy been a hallmark of the evangelical identity in the past, but rather, *should* inerrancy serve as a hallmark of the evangelical identity in the *future*? Peter Enns and others advocating for this new evangelical Bibliology<sup>13</sup> take the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture seriously; however, it is precisely because they take the

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<sup>11</sup> See *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), vol. 4, chap. 5, 333, author’s emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> By “his ilk,” I am refereing to people like Harold Lindsell, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Norman L. Geisler, R.C. Sproul, Rogers Nicole, John Woodbridge, William C. Roach, G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Walter Grudem, and Milliard J. Erickson to name only a few.

<sup>13</sup> Other prominent examples include Kenton Sparks and Andrew McGowan.

authority of Scripture seriously that they seek an adjustment to evangelical Bibliology that is more in line with what they see Scripture as actually doing. As Enns says, “It is not enough simply to say that the Bible is the word of God or that it is inspired or to apply some other label...how does the study of Scripture in the contemporary world affect how we flesh out descriptions such as ‘word of God’ or ‘inspired’?”<sup>14</sup>

As Beale rightly contends, this reassessment of evangelical Bibliology is fueled in part by the rise of critical scholarship within evangelicalism. But it is also the result of what Enns and others see as unsatisfactory answers provided by traditional evangelicalism to some of the vexing problems in Scripture, problems like the question of myth and history in Genesis and inconsistencies in the Bible.<sup>15</sup> While inerrantists see the doctrine of inerrancy as being the unswerving answer to such problems, Enns and others are not so sure that inerrancy is up to the task of the challenges presented by critical scholarship. As Enns notes, “Inerrancy was once the unquestioned epistemological foundation for evangelical faith. In recent generations, it has become *within evangelicalism* a theological problem needing to be addressed.”<sup>16</sup> For Enns, then, this theological problem necessitates a new understanding of evangelical Bibliology and a reexamination of the propriety of the doctrine of inerrancy.

While this reexamination of the doctrine of inerrancy in evangelicalism has caught the

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 17.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, are the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 historical accounts of God’s creative actions or are they simply “myths” appropriated from the surrounding cultures to convey a particular conception of the Israelite God? Furthermore, what is one to do with the seeming inconsistencies or the diversity within the Bible itself? For example, was man created after the other living creatures as is stated in Genesis 1:24-26 or was man created before the living creatures as stated in Genesis 2:18-20? How is one to reconcile just such a difference?

<sup>16</sup> Peter Enns, forward to *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear*, by Carlos R. Bovell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), ix, author’s emphasis.



recent attention of evangelical philosophers, biblical scholars, and church historians,<sup>17</sup> Christian educators and educational theorists in general should also pay heed to this discussion. Why? Because the discussion of Bibliology and inerrancy within evangelicalism is ultimately a discussion concerning the future of evangelical identity and how the enculturation of the next generation of evangelicals is to proceed. Of particular import in this discussion is the question of the intersection of modern scholarship and faith-based identities, and while the focus of this study is on a particular faith-based community, the results of my study are applicable to a vast array of faith-based educational scenarios.

### **§0.1. Central Question of my Study**

The central question for my study is this: Does a commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy produce a pedagogically responsible process of evangelical traditioning? In other words, can inculcating in future evangelicals a robust commitment to inerrancy be seen as something that is pedagogically viable? Or does it result in little more than some form of religious indoctrination?

The charge of indoctrination is a serious one and it should not be raised lightly. However, there are educational scholars who might view the process of religious acculturation as such.<sup>18</sup> While I think such a perspective with respect to inerrancy is completely unwarranted, I wanted to raise this possible objection at the outset. It is also

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<sup>17</sup> e.g. Paul Helm in philosophy; Beale, Vern Poythress, and D.A. Carson in biblical studies; and Carl Trueman in church history.

<sup>18</sup> e.g. Henry Giroux and others associated with critical pedagogy and Michael Hand would be examples that immediately come to mind. See specifically Michael Hand, "A philosophical objection to faith schools." *Theory and Research in Education* 1.1 (2003): 89-99.

important at the outset to clarify that my study is not concerned with the question of the legal appropriateness of faith-based education or various practices within faith-based schools. Rather, my concern is solely with the question of whether or not a commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy makes for a good starting point for teaching about who one is as a member of a particular faith community and what one is to believe about the nature of the Bible.

### **§0.2. Importance of my Study**

The importance of my study is two-fold. First, there has been no systematic treatment of the so-called Peter Enns controversy in any literature to date. While the issues raised in the controversy have received wide attention, no in-depth account of these issues or synthesis of the official reports and reviews surrounding the controversy has been attempted. And secondly, the *pedagogical* questions raised by the controversy have been overlooked nearly entirely by all the literature that has engaged with the controversy.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as I argue in this study, while the concept of evangelical traditioning is an essential component of the controversy, it is not specifically addressed in the literature regarding the controversy. My study directly focuses on these aforementioned gaps in the literature.

### **§0.3. Organization of my Study**

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<sup>19</sup> The one quasi-exception to this statement would be Kenton Sparks' *God's Word in Human Words*. Sparks deals with the same issues as Enns in terms of the integration of critical scholarship within evangelicalism, and he has a substantial discussion of biblical criticism and the Christian academy in his conclusion. However, his book was published in 2008 and so the controversy was not available for him to discuss, though he does make approving mention of I&I in a number of places in his work. Sparks' focus is also not on the notion of traditioning, though, again, he alludes to it very generally.

My study is organized into three chapters. Chapter one investigates traditional evangelical Bibliology through an examination of the concepts of inspiration and inerrancy, a look at the central biblical passage inerrantists cite in support of Scripture's self-attestation of its inerrancy and divinity: 2 Timothy 3:16, and finally I conclude this chapter with a brief history of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Chapters two and three focus on a high profile debate within evangelical theology over the questions of evangelical Bibliology, inerrancy, and traditioning. Chapter two focuses on Peter Enns' controversial *Inspiration and Incarnation*, specifically on his focus on the humanity of Scripture through an exploration of the Ancient near Eastern (ANE) context of Scripture and its use of myth. This chapter concludes with a discussion of Enns' notion of traditioning, focusing on his tripartite concepts of conversation, humility, and patience.

Chapter three recounts the so-called Peter Enns controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) over his *Inspiration and Incarnation*. I begin with a discussion of the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary at the close of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the 1920s. I then consider the official documents produced by WTS surrounding the Enns controversy, namely the Historical and Theological Field Committee Report. In addition, I look at two critical reviews of Enns' work: the first by D. A. Carson, and the second by G.K. Beale. Finally, I trace the inerrantist view of evangelical traditioning through an investigation of two of the articles of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, concluding that the inerrantist model of tradition centers itself on the twin ideas of insulation and dogma.

Chapter four presents the conclusion to my study, and this chapter answers the

central question of my study in the negative, arguing that the use of the doctrine of inerrancy as a method of traditioning evangelicals both stifles theological growth and should be considered intellectually dishonest.

In order to properly begin to address the central question of my study, the remaining part this introduction unpacks some of the key concepts I will be employing frequently in this study by offering definitions of *traditioning*, *pedagogically responsible*, and *evangelicalism*.

#### §0.4. Traditioning

Throughout my study I will employ two specific concepts that require more elucidation. By *traditioning*, I mean what Sara Covin Juengst describes as the “re-presenting ideas and customs from one generation to the next.” Traditioning is the process of handing down beliefs and practices from an older generation to a younger generation. The twin goals of traditioning are identity formation and community reproduction. As Juengst states, “[t]hrough, traditioning, the meaning of a community is appropriated and passed on so that future members of the community will understand who they are and what it means to be a part of the community.”<sup>20</sup>

While this conceptualization of traditioning is rather nebulous, the concept can be divided into a series of components, one of which clearly involves the pedagogical task of inculcating in future generations key doctrinal commitments integral to their self-understanding of who they are and what they believe. The passing down of a religious community’s central doctrines is an important part of any religious group’s pedagogy;

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<sup>20</sup> See Sara Covin Juengst, *Equipping the Saints: Teacher Training in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 9.

however, it is not simply the passing down of said central doctrines that is implicit in the practice of traditioning. Rather, implicit in this process is also equipping future generations with the skills necessary to “reimagine” and “reevaluate” one’s tradition when evidence is presented that directly challenges a tradition’s preconceived doctrines. After all, traditions do not exist in a vacuum, hermetically sealed from change for generations upon generations. Communities are repeatedly confronted with challenges, both internal and external, that force themselves to look anew at their traditions. The important question for traditioning is which of a community’s doctrines need to be reconsidered in light of new evidence or a changing ethos and which are nonnegotiable bedrock of a community’s identity.

For evangelicals, belief in the Bible as God’s word is a one of the nonnegotiable doctrinal commitments that must accompany any sort of traditioning. As evangelicals will argue, by denying that the Bible is God’s word one is denying the fundamental aspect of Scripture that makes it authoritative and “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”<sup>21</sup> As Juengst writes, “Traditioning is necessary for the survival of any institution,”<sup>22</sup> and therefore evangelical institutions charged with the passing down of central evangelical doctrines will necessarily be committed to passing on the belief in the Bible as God’s word. However, what does it mean to say, “the Bible is God’s word”? For inerrantists, the answer to this question is captured solely through the doctrine of inerrancy; for Enns and others, though, it has become clear that inerrancy is not the most appropriate marker for an evangelical

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<sup>21</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> Juengst, *Equipping the Saints*, 10.

understanding of Scripture and, therefore, should not be a hallmark of evangelical traditioning.

### **§0.5. Pedagogically Responsible**

I acknowledge from the outset that any form of theological traditioning will find points of tension with my notion of pedagogical responsibility since it insists on a particular degree of theological reflection. That being said, however, it is not the purpose of this study to highlight all the possible tensions my understanding of pedagogical responsibility may present various forms of theological traditioning. Rather, my sole focus in this study is on the question of whether the traditioning of evangelicals under the auspices of the doctrine of inerrancy is compatible with my notion of pedagogical responsibility. As such, the idea of *pedagogically responsible* used in this study is more of a classification than a straightforward definition.

As I argue in this study, for a practice to qualify as pedagogically responsible it must meet two criteria. Firstly, does the practice or objective impede one's theological growth? By theological growth what I am referring to are the practices and objectives that allow a believer the opportunity to consider, or even reconsider, her/his doctrinal commitments in order to develop a more robust and truly personal theology. For example, simply assenting to the notion that the Bible is God's word is a far weaker theological position than one in which, say, various understandings of what it means to say that the Bible is God's word have been detailed and examined by a believer before she arrives at her own theological position.

I have asked this question in the negative because certain educational activities, say, acquiring research and technical writing skills, are irrelevant to the question of theological growth but are still warranted pedagogical objectives. By framing this criterion in the negative, I avoid necessitating that all pedagogically responsible activities foster theological growth. What this criterion does establish, though, is that no pedagogically responsible activity can be an impediment to theological growth by fundamentally distorting one's ability for deeper or more thoughtful reflection on her theological commitments.

One should not conclude from my criterion of theological growth that a practice must consider all conceivable theological options lest it impede theological growth. I leave room within my definition of theological growth for a certain degree of specification and restriction. For example, asserting that the Bible is God's word is not in itself an impediment to theological growth even though there are a variety of other theological positions on the status of the Bible. What would constitute an impediment to theological growth, however, would be asserting that there has only been one articulation of what it means to say that the Bible is God's word throughout the history of Christianity and that no other conceptions are possible. Such a position is not only historically inaccurate but it also circumvents that ability for the believer to really think meaningfully about the possible array of theological positions available for her consideration within both her own particular faith community and other Christian communities.

The second criterion of pedagogical responsibility asks the following question: is the practice or objective intellectually honest? What I mean by this criterion is that does the process or objective consider all the relevant data and entertain meaningfully what this

data might suggest for one's given position or objective. In this way, then, pedagogically responsible practices or objectives seek to engender openness to engaging with the data. This does not mean that apologetics is intellectually dishonest. Rather, it simply asserts that an apologetics that is recalcitrant with regard to engaging with the data and thoroughly defensive in its posture is less pedagogically responsible than one that is open and engaging with the data, even if they both articulate the same findings. Finally, like my prior criterion of theological growth, this criterion is more of a continuum than it is a fixed point. The either-or dichotomy is not a very fruitful one to employ here. And while certain practices and objectives are rightfully denoted as "intellectually dishonest,"<sup>23</sup> I believe, then, in a number of cases we should be talking about practices and objects in terms of being on a continuum of intellectual honesty.

It could be objected at this point, however, that I have already stacked the deck against inerrancy from the outset with my criteria. Critics may point out that my criteria appear to presupposed an errant and dehistoricized Bible and so my study is less of a philosophical investigation and more of a foregone indictment of inerrancy. While it is true that I am neither an evangelical in particular nor a religious believer in general, the focus of my study is to explicate one of the central components of traditioning within a particular sectarian community and then to examine whether or not such a component can reasonably be said to foster theological growth and intellectual honesty. I am neither interested in constructing a straw man version of inerrancy nor advancing any specific worldview in my study; rather, I am simply trying to answer the question of whether or not the evangelical commitment to inerrancy is compatible with theological growth and

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<sup>23</sup> Saying, for example, that dinosaurs roamed the earth at the same time as humans.



intellectual honesty as I have defined these terms.

### §0.6. Evangelicalism

It is difficult to speak about evangelical theology without, at one time or another, defining exactly what one means by *evangelical*. Defining an “ism” is a tricky matter, and one would be amiss to put too much stock into any one definition of something as complex and nebulous as evangelicalism.<sup>24</sup> That being said, however, some kind of conceptual framework to help describe the parameters of evangelicalism is necessary.

One of the most influential definitions of evangelicalism comes from historian David W. Bebbington. For Bebbington, there are four distinctive features to evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism.<sup>25</sup> As Timothy Larsen explains, this means that evangelicals emphasize “conversion experiences; an active laity sharing the gospel and engaged in good works; the Bible; and salvation through the work of Christ on the cross.”<sup>26</sup> While Bebbington’s definition has become the standard, Larsen has proposed a definition that is better able to restrict the potential scope of the term “evangelical” so that the term can be used in “identifying a specific Christian community.” If the definition of evangelical is not restricted in this way, then a number of figures, say like most medieval Roman Catholic saints, could be considered

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<sup>24</sup> It is probably wise to heed Mark Noll’s advice here when he writes, “‘evangelicalism’ has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. All discussions of evangelicalism, therefore, are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide some order for a multifaceted, complex set of impulses and organizations.” See Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 8.

<sup>25</sup> See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism” in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Trier, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

evangelicals.<sup>27</sup> Since the focus of my study is on a very specific argument among members of the evangelical community, precision in defining the parameters of this community is of utmost importance. For Larsen, then, there are five characteristics to the evangelical.

Firstly, an evangelical is an orthodox Protestant, defined here as a Protestant who accords with Nicene orthodoxy.<sup>28</sup> The Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) form the bedrock of what Larsen considers Nicene Orthodoxy. The main point to take away from this criterion is that Larsen wants to make sure that we establish as a starting point for any notion of evangelicalism the theological parameters of the Trinitarianism expressed in the Nicene Creed. Whether or not this definition is too limited is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, an evangelical is one who stands, as Larsen says, “in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the Eighteenth-Century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield.”<sup>30</sup> There are three important features that need to be emphasized here. Firstly, the historical lineage of contemporary evangelicalism is thought to arise out of a combination of both the Great Awakening (1730s and 40s) and the Second Great Awakening (1790-1840s). Secondly, this lineage, hints, albeit indirectly, at two competing strands within evangelicalism: Protestant Scholasticism expressed during the Great Awakening and the Pietism associated with the

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<sup>27</sup> Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism,” 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the Nicene Creed see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1: *The History of Creeds* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 24-28.

<sup>30</sup> Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism,” 2-7.

Second Great Awakening. And finally, the evangelical tradition is best referred to what John Stackhouse calls *transdenominationalism*, meaning that evangelicalism is not to be thought of as a specific movement within a particular Protestant denomination, but rather, as a loosely-affiliated interdenominational coalition of like-minded believers.<sup>31</sup>

Thirdly, an evangelical holds that the Bible is the divinely inspired final authority in matters of Christian doctrine. What is important to note here is that Larsen does not include the inerrancy of Scripture in his parameters of what constitutes an evangelical. Other evangelicals have been reluctant to allow for this kind of flexibility within evangelicalism with prominent examples including Francis Schaeffer and Harold Lindsell.

However, one may contrast views like Schaeffer's and Lindsell's with a famous example particularly relevant to the issue of the inerrancy debate within evangelicalism: the example of Scottish theologian James Orr (1844-1913). Orr rejected the notion of inerrancy, yet "was recognized worldwide as an evangelical theologian of undisputed orthodoxy" by B.B. Warfield.<sup>32</sup>

The point illustrated by this example, then, is that even from the very inception of the notion of inerrancy there have been individuals clearly within the evangelical fold who have not considered the concept as authoritative. That being said, inerrancy has been a crucial distinguishing feature of evangelicalism for a significant number of

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<sup>31</sup> See Larsen's "Evangelical Theology Should Be Evangelical" in John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *Evangelical futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2000), 56-57.

<sup>32</sup> See Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (1979; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 385-88 and Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 19n20.

evangelicals, though it would be difficult to assert, as Schaeffer and Lindsell did, that inerrancy is a non-negotiable element in the definition of evangelicalism.

What is not up for debate within evangelicalism, however, is the view that the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice. As Larsen states, “Evangelicals believe that the Bible is uniquely the word of God written. The whole of the Bible is authoritative and no other documents possess this exclusive level of authority.”<sup>33</sup> Stackhouse also echoes this sentiment when he writes, “Evangelicalism typically has championed excellent preach, personal bible study, general biblical literacy—all in the name of the unique authority of the Bible for [evangelical] belief and practice.” His position is unswervingly held by all of the biblical scholars and theologians covered in this study.<sup>34</sup>

Fourthly, an evangelical “stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross.”<sup>35</sup> While there is some debate within evangelicalism on the nature of atonement, far and away the most widely held view within evangelicalism is what is called the penal substitution view. In this view, Jesus bears the punishment all of humanity properly deserves for its sins. Jesus, then, voluntarily substitutes himself in our place, and it is only through this voluntary submission that we can possibly hope to be reconciled to all-Holy God.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> See Stackhouse, “Evangelical Theology,” 46.

<sup>35</sup> Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism,” 9.

<sup>36</sup> See Boyd, “The Atonement Debate” in *Across the Spectrum*, 126-32.

And finally, an evangelical stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in matters of conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship.<sup>37</sup> While the rapid growth of Pentecostal and charismatic movements within Christianity have given rise to increased interest in pneumatology—especially in evangelical circles—Larsen notes that an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit can be traced through evangelicalism all the way to the “first generation of Wesley and Whitefield”<sup>38</sup> This emphasis on the Holy Spirit can even be seen in modern evangelical doctrinal statements. For example, in its eight-point statement of faith the National Association of Evangelicals states, “We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential” and “We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.” Along with an insistence on the authority of Scripture, the presence of the Holy Spirit and a discernable moment of conversion are the quintessential hallmarks of evangelicalism.<sup>39</sup> It is also important to note that the criterion mentioned above should not be thought of as operating independently from one another. For example, Louis Igou Hodges writes that, “It is by virtue of the internal witness of the Spirit that a believer acknowledges the inherent authority of Scripture.”<sup>40</sup>

In short, an evangelical is a Protestant who insists on: (i) atonement coming solely through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross, (ii) the sole authority of the Bible in matters of Christian doctrine, and (iii) the importance of the Holy Spirit’s work

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<sup>37</sup> Larsen, “Defining and locating evangelicalism,” 10-12.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>39</sup> See National Association of Evangelicals, Statement of Faith (available at <http://www.nae.net/about-us/statement-of-faith>.)

<sup>40</sup> See Hodges, “New Dimensions in Scripture” in David S. Dockery, ed., *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 223.

in the conversion and enduring fellowship of the believer. I have no intention of using this definition to address the question of who may or may not rightly be considered an evangelical. Rather, my use of this definition is only to roughly give the constraints of the community that currently finds itself in the throes of the debate over the inerrancy of Scripture and its Bibliology. Getting a better understanding of the boundaries of the community embroiled in this debate over Scripture, however, is of little assistance if what exactly the community is debating is still obscure. Therefore, what is needed now is an understanding of what precisely *inerrancy* is and is not and how inerrancy functions as an expression of evangelical Bibliology.

## CHAPTER ONE: EVANGELICAL BIBLIOLOGY AND THE ISSUE OF INERRANCY

### §1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, my chief focus is to give a basic account of an approach to evangelical Bibliology as understood through the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. In discussing a general evangelical understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, I first look at several of the ways in which inspiration has been defined, noting that verbal plenary inspiration is the standard articulation within evangelicalism. Next, I look at the central biblical passage that is utilized by evangelicals to demonstrate that verbal plenary inspiration is self-attested by Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16.<sup>1</sup> I then examine how from this notion of inspiration evangelicals derive the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, concluding this chapter with a brief discussion of the most comprehensive expression of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy utilized by evangelicals: the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

### §1.2. Divine Element of Scripture: Inspiration

Any discussion of biblical inerrancy must begin with a discussion of biblical inspiration.<sup>2</sup> In short, what does it mean for evangelicals to say that the Bible is the *inspired* word of God?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Carl F. Henry held that inspiration and inerrancy were inseparably linked, stating “what is errant cannot be divinely authoritative nor can God have inspired it.” See Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (1976-1982; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 4:192. Quoted in Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville,: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Since part of the focus of this chapter is on inspiration in *evangelical* theology, I will purposefully set aside the view of inspiration associated with Karl Barth known as the Encounter view of inspiration, which argues that while the Bible was composed by human authors just like any other book, through the on-going work of the Holy Spirit the Bible becomes a means of God’s revelation to individuals and communities. For more detailed account of this theory of inspiration see Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London: Intervarsity, 1967), 99-140.

While the literature on this subject is vast,<sup>4</sup> an attempt at an initial working understanding of inspiration is needed. To do that, however, a number of different definitions need to be considered, beginning with the definition found in A.A. Hodge's and B. B. Warfield's classic article "Inspiration," written in 1881. Hodge and Warfield write that inspiration is

God's continued work of superintendence, by which, his providential, gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, he presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the word of God to us.<sup>5</sup>

Another important definition of inspiration to consider is from Millard J. Erickson. In his classic work of systematic theology, *Christian Theology*, Erickson writes, "By inspiration of Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God."<sup>6</sup> Carl Henry offers a similar assessment of what inspiration is when he writes that inspiration is "a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their *oral* and written

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<sup>4</sup> For the contemporary conservative evangelical, however, there are some "essential" on the matter of the inspiration of Scripture. See particularly John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 Vols. 1559 translation edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960); Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. 3 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884); Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Ed. By Samuel G. Craig. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970); and, more recently, John Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Archibald Alexander Hodge and B.B. Warfield, "Inspiration." *Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 6 (April, 1881): 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids; Baker Books, 1988), 225.



proclamation.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, David Dockery provides another succinct definition of inspiration when he writes that inspiration is, “[t]he superintending influence the Holy Spirit exerted on the biblical writers, so that the accent and interpretation of God’s revelation has been recorded as God intended so that the Bible is actually the word of God.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition, J.I. Packer defines inspiration in the following manner:

Biblical inspiration should be defined in the same theological terms as prophetic inspiration: namely, as a whole process (manifold, no doubt, in its psychological forms, as prophetic inspiration was) whereby God moved those men who he had chosen and prepared (cf. Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15) to write exactly what he wanted written for the communication of saving knowledge to his people, and through them to the world.<sup>9</sup>

While all of the above definitions have sought to express the inspiration of Scripture in *general* terms, Louis Igou Hodges offers the following definition of a specifically *evangelical* notion of inspiration. He writes:

Graphic (written) inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into permanent, authoritative, written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who normally worked concurrently and confluent through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely inspired-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the idea and the specific vocabulary), complete,

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:129, my emphasis. Apparently then, for Henry, inspiration refers not only to what was written by the prophets and apostles but also to the material *orally* transmitted by the prophets and apostles presumably not recorded.

<sup>8</sup> David S. Dockery, *Christian Scriptures: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, authority and Interpretation*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1995), 240.

<sup>9</sup> J.I. Packer, “The Inspiration of the Bible” in Philip Wesley Comfort, ed., *The Origins of the Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003), 31.

infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of a good initial understanding of inspiration, a number of comments need to be made about the aforementioned definitions. Hodges' reference to the "original manuscripts," while not explicitly mentioned in the other definitions I cite, is actually implicit in their work. For example, J.I. Packer states, "Inspiredness is not a quality attaching to corruptions that intrude in the course of the transmission of the text, but only to the text as originally produced by the inspired writers."<sup>11</sup> Also, Dockery makes this point when he states, "Thus, our confession of inerrancy and inspiration applies to translations to the degree that they represent accurately the original words."<sup>12</sup> The presumption in evangelical theology is, then, that when we speak of an inspired text what we are actually referring to is the original writings (which are not extant) and the degree to which whatever translation we are examining conforms to these writings.

It is also important to note that while Henry directly references the "chosen prophets and apostles," Dockery uses "biblical writers," which leaves open the question just who the biblical writers are. (i.e. Are they the authors of the various portions of the various texts? Might they be the 'editors' who put those various sections into some sort of cohesive format?<sup>13</sup> Packer's use of "a whole process...to write exactly what he [God] wanted" also hints at the notion of inspiration

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<sup>10</sup> See Louis Igou Hoges, "Evangelical Definition of Inspiration: Critiques and a Suggested Definition," *JETS* 37 no. 1 (March 1994): 109.

<sup>11</sup> See Packer, "The Inspiration of the Bible," 36.

<sup>12</sup> See Dockery, *Christian Scriptures*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> In John J. Yeo's *Plundering the Egyptians*, Marion Ann Taylor points out that as early as 1817, Archibald Alexander, Princeton Theological Seminary's earliest professor, introduced the idea that the OT texts had been edited by later inspired men before "the lamp of inspiration was entirely distinguished." (287) This is significant because as John J. Yeo points out, the idea of "later inspired redactors" was a notion developed by each of the four OT scholars at Westminster Theological Seminary who *preceded* Peter Enns: Robert Dick Wilson, Edward Joseph Young, Raymond Bryan Dillard, and Tremper Longman III. Much more will be said about Yeo's fantastic work in chapter four. See Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812-1929)*. (San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, 1992) and John J. Yeo, *Plundering the Egyptians: The Old Testament and Historical Criticism at Westminster Theological Seminary (1929-1998)*. (Landham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2010).

being extended simply beyond the actual ‘authors’ of the recorded passages. Hodges’s definition, though, places greater import on the written product of the biblical writers than he does the writers themselves. In fact, while Packer’s understanding of the writers seems to be one in which the biblical writers are directed by God, Hodges’s notion allows for the various biblical writers to retain their own spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities. This is not to say that either Packer or Dockery reject Hodge’s assertion; rather, it is simply to say that it is not clear from their stated definitions of inspiration whether or not they believe the biblical writers’ personalities and thought processes are left unadulterated.

The reason for the importance of the question of the human author’s/writer’s humanity has to do with the fact that evangelicals are historically committed to a doctrine of Scripture that sees the Bible as both a divinely inspired revelation from God *and* the work of human authors, what B. B. Warfield described as *concursum*. Warfield’s understanding of *concursum* is one of the mainstays of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and so quoting Warfield at length on this matter is necessary here. In his “Divine and Human in the Bible,” Warfield writes

The fundamental principle of this conception [*concursum*] is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word, and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the Word of God, his utterances, of which he is

in the truest sense the Author. The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived of as flowing confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product. And the two elements are conceived of in the Scriptures as the inseparable constituents of one single and uncompounded product.<sup>14</sup>

One note needs to be repeated from Warfield's notion of concursus and that is that Scripture is simultaneously a fully divine and fully human product through and through. As Warfield writes, "On this conception, therefore, for the first time full justice is done to both elements of Scripture. Neither is denied because the other is recognized. And neither is limited to certain portions of Scripture that place may be made for the other, nor is either allowed to encroach upon the other."<sup>15</sup>

Accounting for the divine-human character of Scripture is central to the discussion of inspiration in evangelicalism and no discussion would be complete without examining, however briefly, the various ways the divine-human aspect of Scripture is to be understood. While ultimately recognized as being a mysterious process, generally speaking, three explanations of inspiration are either recognized by, to varying degrees, or associated with evangelicals who claim inerrancy of Scripture as potential candidates for describing the inspiration of Scripture

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<sup>14</sup> See B.B. Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," in *Selected Shorter Writings* vol 2 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980), 547. Dockery echoes Warfield when he writes, "The Bible is a book written by numerous authors over a period of hundreds of years, and yet at the same time it is the Word of God. It is our belief that the divine-human tension is the most crucial issue in contemporary discussions concerning Christian Scripture." See Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 37. The divine-human authorship of the Bible, which conjures various degrees of affinity with the logic of the doctrine of the Incarnation, is readily acknowledged by contemporary evangelicals of both conservative and liberal stripes as being one of the most salient issues in evangelical scholarship and will serve as the basis for our discussion of the so-called Peter Enns controversy in the next two chapters.

<sup>15</sup> Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," 547. Again, it is difficult not to draw comparisons between the doctrine of the Incarnation and Warfield's understanding of concursus, at least in terms of a heuristic device.

and the divine-human aspects of Scripture.<sup>16</sup> David Dockery's *Christian Scripture* presents a good discussion of these explanations and I will use it as my primary source for discussing these explanations. Let us begin with the view of inspiration most pejoratively associated with evangelicals who hold to inerrancy: dictation.

### §1.2.1. Dictation View of Inspiration

Under this view, the human authors are thought to have their writings directly dictated by God. Support for such a position comes from particular passages (most readily found in the prophetic books of the Old Testament) where, as Dockery notes, “the Spirit is pictured as telling the human writer what to communicate.”<sup>17</sup> These passages (indicated by some variant of the phrases “thus says the Lord...”<sup>18</sup>) are thought to give an account as to how the entirety of the Bible was composed (i.e. by the human authors principally functioning as God’s scribes, communicating his Words exactly in the manner in which they were dictated to them by God.) There is an overwhelming consensus in evangelical scholarship that this view of inspiration is to

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<sup>16</sup> Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article VII, Affirmation. I have deliberately avoiding discussing the Illumination view of inspiration—the idea that the biblical authors had their religious insights elevated beyond their normal human capacities—for two reasons. First, the view is thoroughly rejected by the Chicago Statement (see Article VII) and is generally thought of to be a very limiting view of inspiration that fails to really capture the dual divine-human characteristic of Scripture. And secondly, it corresponds most closely with the idea of inspiration as we commonly use the term (e.g. artistic inspiration, etc.) and not how inspiration as “God-breathed” is discussed in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). I will say more about this in §1.3. below.

<sup>17</sup> I will be using the moniker “Old Testament” (OT) throughout this study to refer to the thirty-nine canonical books recognized by the Westminster Confession of Faith.

<sup>18</sup> The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are fertile ground for such passages as they are littered through the books. For example, Jeremiah 1:1-2 begins with “The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priest who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon...” (See also Jer 11:1, 13:1; 18:1; 19:1, etc.) The book of Ezekiel also begins with a similar announcement (Ezekiel 1:2). (See also Ezek 7:1; 13:1; 25:1, etc.)

be rejected along the lines of being docetic.<sup>19</sup> In addition, while one might contend that such a mechanical understanding of inspiration is appropriate for a certain genre of Scripture (i.e. the prophetic and historical books), it does not stand to reason that such a view sufficiently describes all of the various genres represented in the Bible (i.e. the gospels, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

### §1.2.2. Dynamic View of Inspiration

While a plenary dictation view is widely spurned by evangelical theologians,<sup>21</sup> there is another view of inspiration articulated in evangelical theology that seeks to take seriously the divine-human character of Scripture. This view is known as the dynamic view of inspiration and, according to Dockery, can be found in the work of theologians such as Donald Bloesch and G.C. Berkouwer.<sup>22</sup> As Dockery understands it, this view of inspiration “sees the work of the

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<sup>19</sup> Docetism, from the Greek *dokein*, to seem or to appear, is the belief that Jesus did not have a physical human body, only the appearance of one. Such a belief has been associated with the Gnostics of the second century and, as Alister McGrath notes, docetism represents more of a tendency in theology rather than a authoritative theological position. Docetism is considered heretical in light of the dual nature of Christ (fully human, fully divine) articulated in the Council of Chalcedon in 451. See Alister E. McGrath, *An Introduction to Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 127. What is curious is that apart from the the most mechanical versions of the dictation view of inspiration, inerrantist evangelicals rarely (if ever) accuse competing accounts of the doctrine of Scripture as docetic. If anything, their chief objection to “errant” doctrines of Scripture is that they border on a kind of Scriptural psilanthropism, viewing the Bible as “merely a human product.”

<sup>20</sup> As we will see in our discussion of inerrancy, the question of authorial intent and genre is a central but complicated one for inerrantists. In support of the insufficiency of the dictation view Dockery offers Luke 1:1-4 as an example of collection and compilation on the part of a biblical writer that cannot be accommodated by the dictation view of inspiration. Lk 1:1-4 reads “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” (NRSV)

<sup>21</sup> It should be said, though, that it is possible that certain portions of Scripture could have been dictated. For example, Jeremiaiah 36:2 says: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today.” (NRSV) However, what is being denied by most evangelical theologians is that dictation as a comprehensive method for the inspiration of the entire Bible is a plausible explanation. See Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> See Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL, 1994) and G.C. Berkouwer, *Der Heilige Schrift*, I and II. Kampen, The Netherlands: J.H. Kok N.V., 1966, 1967. Translated by Jack B. Rogers as *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,

Spirit in directing the writer to the concepts he<sup>23</sup> should have then allowing great freedom for the human author to express this idea in his own style, through his own personality, in a way consistent with and characteristic of his own situation and context.”<sup>24</sup> As Bloesch says, inspiration is: “the divine election and guidance of the biblical prophets and the ensuring of the writings as a compelling witness to revelation, the opening of the eyes of the people of that time to the truth of these writings, and the providential preservation of these writings as the unique channel of revelation.”<sup>25</sup>

The benefit of this approach to inspiration over something like dictation is that it takes the human authorship of Scripture seriously while still confirming a type of divine superintendence of Scripture. In addition, such a view, as indicated by Bloesch’s definition above, seeks to expand God’s superintendence beyond simply the biblical authors themselves to the communities of believers surrounding the biblical authors. As Bloesch states, “In this definition I am thinking basically of the illumination of hearers and readers in biblical history.”<sup>26</sup> Dockery finds such an expansion admirable, but there remains a problem with the dynamic view in that it

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1975). It is probably warranted to think of the dynamic view as representing a spectrum rather than a single approach to understanding inspiration. Dockery also lists William J. Abraham and Paul J. Achtemeier as representatives of this view, though it is not clear whether all of aforementioned figures should be rightly classified as evangelicals (i.e. for example, Nichols and Brandt consider Berkouwer a “neo-orthodox” theologian. See Nichols and Brandt, *Ancient Word, Changing World*, 58.); William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*. Whether Dockery’s classification of each of the aforementioned figures as those expressing a dynamic view of the inspiration of Scripture is accurate or not is beyond the scope of my study.

<sup>23</sup> I will retain the masculine pronouns used by Dockery here to avoid convoluted quotations.

<sup>24</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 119. It is important here to recognize, as Bloesch does, the difference between the initiation act of the Spirit’s inspiration in the past and the Spirit’s enlightening work in the present. For an expansion of this idea to include the “subsequent history of the people of faith” see Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 119 and William Child Robinson, “The Inspiration of Holy Scripture,” *Christianity Today* 13, no. 1 (October 11, 1968): 7

places the emphasis of God's superintendence on the purpose and process of inspiration instead of on the product, namely, Scripture itself. As Dockery notes, under the dynamic view, then, "inspiration...is...generally limited to God's initiating impulse, and thus the stress of inspiration falls not upon the product—Scripture itself—but on the purpose and the process...The real shortcoming of this approach...is its imbalanced stress upon God's initiating impulse rather than His superintending work over the entire process *and product*."<sup>27</sup>

The problem here is this: if one locates inspiration in the concepts and themes developed by the biblical authors and their communities and not on the very words recorded in Scripture itself, then there arises a difficulty in understanding the *sensus literalis* of what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God. As Bloesch states, "inspiration means that the authors were guided to choose words that correspond with God's Word. But we are not to conclude that they are identical with God's Word, for no human language can encompass or exhaust the unsurpassable reality of divine knowledge and wisdom."<sup>28</sup> Yet, as Charles Hodge had stated in the nineteenth century,

In saying that the Bible is the word of God, we mean that he is its author[;] that he says whatever the Bible says; that everything which the Bible affirms to be true is true; that whatever it says is right is right, and whatever it declares wrong is wrong, because its declaration as to truth and duty, as to facts and principles, are the declarations of God...everything in the Bible which purports to be the word of God, or which is uttered by those whom he used as his messengers, is to be received with the same faith and submission, as though spoken directly by the lips of God himself.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scriptures*, 54, my emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Hodge, "Inspiration," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 29 (October 1857): 663-664.



Given Hodge's understanding of what it means to say that the Bible is the word of God, it is not difficult to see why making sure that inspiration covers not only the process and purpose but also the product of Scripture is warranted. It is for this reason, then, that while Dockery acknowledges the importance of applying divine inspiration to the biblical writers themselves (2 Pet 1:19-21), he argues for an understanding of inspiration that applies most saliently to the writings of the biblical authors (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>30</sup>

### §1.2.3. Plenary View of Inspiration

The view endorsed by Dockery and held nearly ubiquitously by other inerrantists is that of the plenary view of inspiration. In short, such a view articulates that the Bible is inspired in all its parts; however, to be more precise, it should be noted that by plenary inspiration Dockery also implies concursive and verbal inspiration.<sup>31</sup> An excellent understanding of the plenary view of inspiration with all the components that Dockery has in mind here is provided by Stanley E. Anderson, who writes,

Verbal inspiration is that extraordinary and supernatural influence exerted by the Holy Spirit upon the writers of the sixty-six books of the Bible [plenary] by which their words were rendered also the words of God and were preserved from all error and omission, thus producing an infallible original record. Each writer was guided so that *his choice* of

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<sup>30</sup> See Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 54. The Scriptural passages alluded to are provided directly by Dockery himself. They state: "So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:19-21); and "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). More will be said about 2 Timothy 3:16 in §1.3.

<sup>31</sup> Dockery succinctly states as much when he writes, "Inspiration is thus concursive and plenary, meaning that all Scripture is inspired. We affirm verbal inspiration, meaning that the Spirit's work influences even the choice of words by the human authors." See Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 55.

words was also the choice of the Holy Spirit, thus making the product the Word of God as well as the work of man [concurative].<sup>32</sup>

Under this notion of inspiration, both the divine element of Scripture, represented by the influence and safeguarding of the Holy Spirit, and the human element of Scripture, namely, the individual style and background of the biblical authors, are properly balanced, and for Dockery, then, this view of inspiration “best accounts for the design and character of Scripture and the human circumstances of the Bible’s composition.”<sup>33</sup> Such an understanding of inspiration also allows for comprehension of the *sensus literalis* of what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God. The words recorded by the biblical authors in the autographs, influenced and safeguarded by the Holy Spirit, are, in short, the words of God. The importance of this assertion has to do with how the Bible views itself as Scripture—its self-attestation—a point cogently expressed by J.I. Packer when he writes that the “purpose of this usage [Word of God] is to make explicit the biblical conception of Scripture—which is that Scripture is the sum total of divine revelation recorded in a God-breathed (*theopneustos*) written form, and that every scriptural statement is therefore to be received as a divine utterance.”<sup>34</sup> This understanding of how the Bible views itself as Scripture is of central importance for the doctrines of inerrancy and inspiration, and evangelicals committed to these doctrines have located several passages in the Bible to support their assertion of the Bible as the Word of God.<sup>35</sup> However, one specific

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<sup>32</sup> Stanley E. Anderson, “Verbal Inspiration Inductively Considered,” in Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 13, my emphasis. See also Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 43, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> J. I. Packer, “*Fundamentalism*” and *the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), 85-86.

<sup>35</sup> An exhaustive list is not possible here, but some of the principal passages cited are Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; 31:24; Psalms 12:6; 119:89; Luke 24:25, 27; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Timothy 3:16; and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

biblical passage stands at the center of the discussion: 2 Timothy 3:16. It is to a brief survey of this text that I shall turn my attention to now.

### §1.3. Scripture's Divine Self-Attestation: The Biblical Foundation of the Doctrine of Inerrancy

In the NRSV, 2 Timothy 3:16 reads as follows:

<sup>16</sup>All scripture is ***inspired by God*** (*theopneustos*) and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (NRSV, my emphasis)

While inerrantists key in on the word *theopneustos*, translated here as inspired by God, for their understanding of the divine inspiration of Scripture, others express doubts as to the usefulness of *theopneustos* for discussions of the inspiration of Scripture. As Kern Robert Trembath contends “*Theopneustos* is a *hapax legomenon* [‘something’ said once]: it occurs only here in the Bible [2 Tim 3:16], and only rarely outside of it. Thus we have extremely little to go on in order to discover what the author of 2 Timothy intended by the word.”<sup>36</sup> What I have offered below are three English translations of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and, in each, I have highlighted how *theopneustos* has been translated in other popular English Bibles.

KJV	NIV	ESV
<sup>16</sup> All scripture is <b><i>given by inspiration of God</i></b> , and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (my emphasis)	<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is <b><i>God-breathed</i></b> and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (my emphasis)	<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is <b><i>breathed out by God</i></b> and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (my emphasis)

<sup>36</sup> Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration*, 6.

What is important for my discussion here is that there is general agreement among inerrantists that the language found in the NIV and the ESV is preferable over than of the NRSV and KJV. As Erickson has noted, “God-breathed” seems to be a more “correct” understanding of the definition of *theopneustos*, a position that Wayne Grudem also shares. This is an important point to consider because Wayne Grudem and Milliard Erickson are two of two of the most influential systematic theologians in evangelical theology, and both, but Grudem in particular, are widely held to be systematicians of inerrancy *par excellence*. Grudem’s discussion of this point is telling and requires that I quote him at length here. He writes,

Older systematic theologies used the words *inspired* and *inspiration* to speak of the fact that the word of Scripture are spoken by God. This terminology was based on an older translation of 2 Tim. 3:16, which said, ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God...’ (KJV). However, the word *inspiration* has such a weak sense in ordinary usage today (every poet or songwriter claims to be ‘inspired’ to write, and even athletes are said to give ‘inspired’ performances) that I have not used it in this text. I have preferred the NIV rendering of 2 Tim. 3:36, ‘God-breathed.’”<sup>37</sup>

For this reason then, it is probably best to opt for the understanding of *theopneustos* to be that of “God-breathed” or “breathed out by God” as found in the NIV and ESV translations.<sup>38</sup>

Two other important points need to be made clear about the various translations of 2 Timothy. First, in each translation *scripture* is qualified by the adjective “all,” (*pas*) and secondly, in both

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<sup>37</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 75n6, and Milliard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 227. Again, as said above, both of these texts are esteemed as contemporary classics in systematic theology and are still widely used in many evangelical colleges and seminaries.

<sup>38</sup> As Bruce Corely states, “The Greek word [*theonepeustos*] is properly understood not as *in*-spiration, breathing into something, but as *ex*-piration, something breathed out.” See Bruce Corely, “Biblical Teaching on Inspiration and Inerrancy,” in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 452.

the NIV and the ESV *scripture* is capitalized (“All Scripture...”) suggesting, as Grudem notes, that what is being referenced here is the “writings of the Old and New Testaments, which have historically been recognized as God’s words in written form. Another term for the Bible.”<sup>39</sup> It is principally from this understanding of “God-breathed” as applying to “all Scripture” (*pas graphē theopneustos*) that support is marshaled for the inerrantist claim of plenary verbal inspiration that the Bible seemingly *self-attests* to.

Critics are quick to point out that such a rendering of *theopneustos* is more doctrinally self-serving than it is self-attesting, however. As Trembath notes, it is impossible to know just what *Scripture* the author of 2 Timothy has in mind. Trembath asks, “Were they the Old Testament canon? In Hebrew or in Greek? Oral or written? Including or excluding the Apocrypha? The ‘autographs’ or the manuscripts available to the author in the first century?”<sup>40</sup> How you answer Trembath’s questions determines what *theopneustos* properly refers to, and since we have no way of answering Trembath’s questions, it would appear as if we are left with no way to confirm Grudem’s claim that *pas graphē theopneustos* in 2 Tim 3:16 directly correlates to the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible as defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith. While this is a rather devastating criticism for the plenary view of inspiration, it is incumbent upon us to move from the inerrantist inspiration and its biblical mooring to discuss the central notion of this chapter: the evangelical doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

#### **§1.4. Interpreting the Divine Element of Scripture: Discussing Inerrancy**

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<sup>39</sup> See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1254. This raises an immediate concern, however. As one might rightfully ask, how is it possible that the author of 2 Timothy *intended* to make reference to the collection of the twenty-seven books that comprise the New Testament given that there was no canonical text until the fourth century?

<sup>40</sup> Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration*, 6.

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy might seem rather straightforward. After all, it simply asserts that the Bible is “without error.” But this raises the question of what actually counts as an *error*. To help illustrate this issue, let us consider the following mundane example. Let us say that my wife asks me how my teaching went today, and I respond in a frustrated manner that “*none* of my students understood *anything* from the lectures this week.” However, two of my students received perfect scores on their quizzes and answered every question I asked the class correctly. Have I committed what we might rightfully call an error in the above example? I argue that the answer to this question is not readily apparent. After all, is the above statement meant as a universal declaration about the actual performance of my students? Or is it simply a statement about my general frustration with the overall performance of my students? My intended meaning in the aforementioned statement directly relates to the question of whether or not I have committed an error. If read as a universal declaration about performance then clearly I have erred. However, if read as hyperbole, indicating solely my level of frustration with my students, then it does not seem that I have erred since my intention was never to exhaustively comment on the actual performance of all my students.

As the previous example illustrates, authorial intention is a salient factor in determining whether or not errors are present in any given text. However, unlike my mundane example, determining authorial intention can be a rather complicated task, specifically when one is attempting to determine the authorial intention of biblical authors. For example, when introducing the figure of John the Baptist, Matthew 3:4-6 states:

<sup>4</sup>Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about

the Jordan were going out to him, and <sup>6</sup>they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (ESV, my emphasis)

Now, how are we to understand the author of Matthew's use of "all" (*pas*) in verse 5? Does the author mean all in the sense of literally every single person, or is he speaking in terms of hyperbole? Clearly, if we read *pas* in the literal sense than most certainly we should classify this statement in Matthew as an error; however, if we read *pas* as being hyperbolic in nature—the same way I used *none* and *anything* in my second example above—than we should be hesitant to refer to the passage in Matthew as an error. Inerrancy requires us to assign intention to the author of this specific passage; namely, an intention that is "without error." The problem is, though, that in this example it is unclear whether the author's intended use of *pas* is an example of exhaustive or hyperbolic speech. Since there is no way to confirm the author's actual intended use of *pas* in the aforementioned example, and since it is the author's intended use of *pas* that determines the accuracy of his statement, it seems that inerrancy requires us to make a pronouncement on the author's intended meaning of *pas* without considering what the author's intended meaning actually is. Is it not a precarious position to assign intended meaning to a biblical author's statements when such assignments are non-falsifiable?

Furthermore, an additional level of complexity arises when one asks what it means to say that the Bible is "without error" with respect to seemingly historical or scientific claims made in the Bible. For instance, if the Bible is without error in matters of history and science then does that mean that Jonah really lived in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights, or that the heavens and the earth were created in six literal days?<sup>41</sup> Should we not conceive of such statements to be in error since they contradict our basic modern understandings of human

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<sup>41</sup> See Jonah 1:17 and Genesis 1:1-2:3a respectively.

physiology and planetary geology? Also, at the time of his birth, were Jesus' parents *from* Bethlehem as reported in Matthew, or were they traveling *from* Nazareth *to* Bethlehem as reported in Luke? If the Bible is to be without error that seems to suggest the need for consistency in the reporting of events in the various biblical accounts, does it not?<sup>42</sup> After all, if the report in Matthew 1:18-25; 2:11 is correct then must not the account in Luke 2:1-17 be seen as erroneous and vice versa? Compare Matthew 1:18-25; 2:11 and Luke 2:1-7 on this point. It is important that we get a clear idea on what an error implies. As Stephen T. Davis states, there are two sorts of errors that need to be distinguished when we talk about the inerrancy of Scripture. The first type of error is what we would consider incorrect matters of fact. The examples I used from Jonah and Genesis above demonstrate this type of error; either Jonah was, in fact, swallowed by a fish or he was not. If he was not, then Jonah 1:17 represents an error in a matter of fact. However, there is another type of error that we need to consider, what we might want to refer to as an error of inconsistency. These errors occur when the same event or a fact is presented in the text in inconsistent ways. For example, where Jesus' parents live would be a potential example of this type of error. While we have no real way of telling whether the Matthean or the Lukan account of where Jesus' parents lived before his birth is the "correct" account, it would be impossible for both of them to be correct simultaneously. It is not the case, then, that Matthew is right and Luke is wrong or vice versa; rather, it is the case that either Matthew or Luke is wrong, and while we cannot really determine which one is incorrect, it must

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<sup>42</sup> Another excellent example of the this would be 1 Kings 4:26 and 2 Chronicles 9:25. In the reporting of how many stalls Solomon had for his chariot horses, while 1 Kings states that Solomon had 40,000, 2 Chronicles states that he had only 4,000. A good list of these kinds of discrepancies is offered by Kenton L. Sparks in his *God's Word in Human Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105. For a distinction between errors of fact and errors of consistency, see Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 24.



be the case that at least one of them is in error in terms of the actual facts on the ground.<sup>43</sup> Since the biblical author's *intended* meaning is paramount whether or not something is considered to be an "error" in the Bible,<sup>44</sup> then how, exactly, is such an intention to be discerned? Furthermore, how is one to handle discrepancies of number found in the Bible? Should such discrepancies be thought of as "errors" immediately?<sup>45</sup> If so, what does this say about how we understand biblical inerrancy as a statement about the Bible being without error?

In his seminal work *Christian Theology*, Millard J. Erickson discusses four various conceptions of inerrancy.<sup>46</sup> For Erickson, the most "conservative" view of the doctrine of inerrancy is what he calls absolute inerrancy. The absolute inerrantist, Erickson claims, asserts that "the biblical writers intended to give a considerable amount of exact scientific and historical data," and, therefore, the Bible is fully true, even in the details of scientific and historical matters.<sup>47</sup> Like absolute inerrancy, Erickson's second conception of inerrancy, what he calls full inerrancy, also articulates that the Bible is fully true, including in terms of scientific and historical details. However, full inerrantists argue that scientific and historical statements made in the Bible are, while correct, "reported the way they appear to the human eye. They are not

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<sup>43</sup> See Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 24.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Hodge makes this point explicit, arguing that errors must be found in material explicitly taught by the authors. See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. 1871. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001: 1:169. The idea of "authorial intent" is a significant one for the inerrantist, and I will say more about this later in this chapter.

<sup>45</sup> An excellent example of this would be 1 Kings 4:26 and 2 Chronicles 9:25. In the reporting of how many stalls Solomon had for his chariot horses, while 1 Kings states that Solomon had 40,000, 2 Chronicles states that he had only 4,000. A good list of these kinds of discrepancies is offered by Kenton L. Sparks in his *God's Word in Human Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105.

<sup>46</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988. It should also be noted that David Dockery identifies nine different methods used within evangelical circles to articulate the doctrine of inerrancy. See David S. Dockery, "Variations in Inerrancy," *SBC Today* (May 1986): 10-11; cited in Hodges, "New Dimensions in Scripture," 212-13.

<sup>47</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 248. It is still unclear how such a position necessarily addresses the question of authorial intention, though.

necessarily exact; rather, they are popular descriptions, often involving general references or approximations.”<sup>48</sup> Limited inerrancy, Erickson’s third conception, also claims the Bible to be fully true, but only in regards to “its salvific doctrinal references.”<sup>49</sup> Since the Bible’s chief concern is neither science nor history, but rather, soteriology, we should not expect exactness in its reporting of scientific or historical claims. While limited inerrantists grant that it is possible for the Bible to contain “errors” in terms of scientific or historical data, since the Bible does not profess to teach science or history, such “errors” need not concern us because it was not the intention of its authors to make detailed scientific or historical claims.<sup>50</sup> Lastly, Erickson’s final conception of inerrancy, the most “liberal” of the conceptions he considers, is termed inerrancy of purpose. For the inerrantist of purpose, the “purpose of the biblical revelation is to bring people into personal fellowship with Christ, not to communicate *truths*.”<sup>51</sup> In this sense, then, inerrancy is not to be associated with “factuality,” but rather with efficacy in meeting a set of desire ends—namely, bringing people into fellowship with Christ. For the inerrantist of purpose, then, since the Bible’s purpose is to bring people into fellowship with Christ, and since the Bible performs this “purpose” flawlessly, it can rightfully be stated that with respect to this purpose the

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<sup>48</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 248. Though not explicitly stated by Erickson, this phenomenological aspect of full inerrancy has embedded within it a notion of authorial intent which is not completely explained. For example, let’s say that my wife asks me what time it is and I say about half past the hour. While it is actually only 28 past the hour, my reporting of the time would not be considered erroneous because I was not seeking to make a precise rendering of the time, but rather, was simply attempting to report the time in more general manner.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that limited inerrancy grants more weight to the historical embeddedness of the biblical authors than does either absolute or full inerrancy. As Erickson states, “[for limited inerrantists] The Bible writers were subject to the limitations of their time.” (248) This would also be true for the full inerrantists, though, since they are also relying on popular conventions in their reporting of events. Again, the question of how the intention of any given author is to be determined remains unclear.

<sup>51</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 249, my emphasis. Erickson is using “truths” here to refer to propositional statements.

Bible is to be considered without error and thus inerrant.<sup>52</sup>

Erickson's continuum of inerrancy is helpful in understanding the varieties of potential inerrantist positions and he is not the only scholar to provide a nuanced understanding of the continuum that exists within the inerrantist community. Since debates about what inerrancy means are central to the argument of the supposed erosion of the doctrine, it is important to consider in detail the different variants that may operate under the heading of inerrancy. For this task, the work of Gabriel Fackre is quite useful.<sup>53</sup> Fackre identifies three different versions of inerrancy. First, what Fackre calls *transmissive* inerrancy. This is the most conservative of the three views, emphasizing a plain and literal meaning of the text while, fully acknowledging both the human and divine nature of Scripture, the human aspects of Scripture are kept to a minimum with the "Spirit [watching] over the processes of transmission as well as the writing of Scripture to provide us with an inerrant document."<sup>54</sup> According to Fackre, harmonization of difficulties in the text to ensure the ongoing inerrancy of the text is a key activity of the transmissive inerrantist.

Secondly, there is what Fackre calls *trajectory* inerrancy. While the trajectory inerrantists argues for complete inerrancy of the original autographs, s/he will claim inerrancy for modern texts only insofar as they accurately depict what is contained in the autographs. As George Michael Coon notes, for the trajectory inerrantist, "inerrancy, as a characteristic of the original

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<sup>52</sup> It is important to note here, however, that while this is a type of inerrancy identified by Erickson, scholars have been cautious to actually label such a view 'inerrancy.' For example, James W. Volez states that "It is important to note that inerrancy is not to be confused with causative authority or **efficacy**, which denotes the ability of someone/something to accomplish a desired end. This characteristic concerns Scripture's ability to accomplish its purpose [e.g. John 20:31]." See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*. 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 239, author's emphasis.

<sup>53</sup> See particularly Fackre, *The Christian Story: Vol 2. Pastoral Systematics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 2:64-69.

<sup>54</sup> Fackre, *The Christian Story*, 2:66.

manuscripts only, ensures epistemic stability insofar as the current translations accurately reflect them. For this reason, then, critical scholarship, namely textual criticism, is welcomed by trajectory inerrantist “in order to get as close as possible to a fully accurate rendering of the original manuscripts.”<sup>55</sup>

And finally, Fackre’s third version of inerrancy is what he calls *intentional* inerrancy. For Fackre, this is the most liberal view of inerrancy, and, while it too holds to inerrant autographs, it does so only with respect to their *authorial* intent. As Fackre notes, “The Bible is to be understood according to its authorial intent...Intentional inerrantists are determined to stay within the confines of historic intentionality—poetry read as poetry, history as history, doctrine as doctrine, homily as homily, as these genres are interpreted in the mode of the culture in which they originally appeared.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, intentional inerrantists seek to let the Bible speak on its own terms, placing a greater emphasis on the human aspects of Scripture than either transmission or trajectory inerrantists. Also, unlike transmission and trajectory inerrantists, intentional inerrantists are typically active in conversations with those in critical scholarship. For this reason, then, they often come under attack by more conservative inerrantists.

Yet, as helpful as these variations might appear to be, they could also be somewhat misleading. After all, those subscribing to absolute or full inerrancy would hardly consider limited or inerrancy of purpose to be anything remotely akin to what they mean by “inerrancy,” and it is hard to see how inerrantists of purpose or limited inerrantists could find much viability in the claims of the absolute or full inerrantist.

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<sup>55</sup> See George Michael Coon, “Recasting Inerrancy: The Doctrine of Scripture in Carl Henry and the Old Princeton School” (PhDdiss., University of Toronto, 2009), 9.

<sup>56</sup> Fackre, *The Christian Story*, 2:68. Determining original authorial intention is still a rather vague process, however. In addition, this would also mean that as our understanding of the parameters of ancient literary genres change then so too would our understanding of how such genres are to be read. This would imply a rather tentative approach to circumscribing fixed and rigid boundaries within biblical genres.

Moreover, a cursory glance of the contemporary literature defending the doctrine of inerrancy does not have in its purview conceptions like limited or inerrancy of purpose; rather, the doctrine of inerrancy in this literature is nearly always formulated in terms of what Erickson calls full inerrancy, or some sort of blend of Fackre's inerrancy of trajectory and intention.<sup>57</sup> What is needed now, then, is a working definition of inerrancy that thoroughly captures Erickson's expression of full inerrancy.

A number of succinct definitions of inerrancy may be found in the literature. For instance, Gabriel Fackre states, "Proponents of inerrancy believe that the Bible in its original form is without errors in all the matters about which it chooses to speak."<sup>58</sup> Robert Preus defines inerrancy by stating that, "In calling the sacred Scripture inerrant we recognize in them... words taught by the Holy Spirit, that quality which make them overwhelmingly reliable witnesses to the words and deeds of the God who has in His inspired spokesmen and in His incarnate Son disclosed Himself to men for their salvation." And Paul D. Feinberg says that "Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."<sup>59</sup> In his *Christian Scripture*, David S. Dockery, President of Union University, writes that inerrancy means that

*when all the facts are known, the Bible (in its original writings) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its*

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<sup>57</sup> While Harold Lindsell represents an example of absolute inerrancy, I contend that full inerrancy is a better approximation of the actual position of even the most conservative in the inerrantist camp. A recent and excellent example of this tendency can be found in L. Russ Bush, "Understanding Biblical Inerrancy." *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Vol. 50, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 20-55.

<sup>58</sup> See Frackre, *The Christian Story*, 65.

<sup>59</sup> Preus, "The Inerrancy of Scripture" in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy*, 47 and Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy" in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 294.

*composition* will be shown to be *completely true (and therefore not false)* in all that it *affirms*, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation.<sup>60</sup>

Dockery's definition of inerrancy requires additional explication, and Dockery provides his definition with a number of qualifying points. Firstly, it is important that we clarify what is meant by "when all the facts are known." Given our sinful and finite minds, Dockery argues, we should proceed with caution when interpreting the facts we have about the Bible precisely because our limited and insufficient perspective is liable to misinterpret some of these facts. Furthermore, we should acknowledge, again, given our limitations, that we might not be in possession of all the data needed to fully understand every statement in the Bible. As a result of our limited and insufficient perspective with respect to the Bible, therefore, Dockery argues that we should proceed from the basis of faith, exercising "caution with things we might not understand until all the facts are known."<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, Dockery wishes to qualify the proper extent to which various translations and copies of Scripture can appropriately be classified as inerrant, and he does so by restricting the claim of inerrancy to only the Bible's *autographs*, or the original documents written by the actual

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<sup>60</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995), 64, my emphasis. I contend that both of these definitions are coherently and thoroughly encapsulated in Dockery's definition. Furthermore, as I will show later, Dockery's definition serves as a good shorthand for the elaborate declaration made by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 64. This point is also made in Roger R. Nicole's "The Nature of Inerrancy" in Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, eds., *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 71-95. For Nicole, examples like the "essence and trinity of persons in the Godhead" that extend beyond the scope of our finite rational capacity should never be considered as erroneous information presented in the Bible. He writes, "we should never commit the grievous mistake of regarding as error or contradiction in Scripture what simply transcends our finite minds by simultaneously asserting complementary aspects of the truth whose ultimate harmony is perceived in infinity by is not accessible to finite rational investigation," 87. What odd about both these claims is that, first, Nicole's example of the doctrine of the trinity is not explicitly an affirmation in the Bible. Secondly, the admission of our limited epistemic capacity to comprehend fully statements in the Bible is never seen as a hindrance to our 'comprehension' of the doctrine of inerrancy, which like the trinity, is not explicitly an affirmation in the Bible, but rather, is a correlate of a particular view of inscripturation coupled with a particular doctrine of God.

biblical authors themselves. For Dockery and most inerrantists, inerrancy should not be extended to any reproduction of the biblical text by subsequent copyists or editors, but rather, the claim of inerrancy rests solely with the original, unadulterated documents produced by the biblical authors themselves.<sup>62</sup> This is one of the most misunderstood and contentious of all the points surrounding the inerrancy debate. In short, what Dockery is arguing for is that only the original *words—and their intended meanings*—of the initial composition of the various books of the Bible are inerrant.<sup>63</sup> It is important to make two caveats to this point at the present time. Firstly, we do not have access to the autographs themselves because they simply no longer exist.<sup>64</sup> And secondly, it is the words (and their meanings) themselves and not the manuscripts the words are found on that are considered *inerrant* for Dockery and his ilk.<sup>65</sup>

Inerrantists will claim that this is a crucial point that generally fails to receive the attention it deserves. They claim the lack of the physical documents of the autographs lead theologians to dismiss this proposition outright as non-falsifiable at best, absurd at worst. Such a dismissal, notes Greg L. Bahnsen, “confuses autographic *text* (the words) with autographic *codex* (the physical document).”<sup>66</sup> One cannot properly infer from the lack of a physical document that the content of said document has not been preserved, at least to a certain extent.<sup>67</sup> What Bahnsen

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<sup>62</sup> This is a somewhat complicated claim, however. For example, the notion of “later inspired redactors” is not completely discounted by all inerrantists. See Yeo *Plundering the Egyptians*, 279-289.

<sup>63</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 64.

<sup>64</sup> However, might one not meaningfully ask, “how do you know the autographs *ever* existed in this way in the first place”?

<sup>65</sup> Again, though, a similar twofold question can be asked: “how do you know they *ever* existed and what they original meant?”

<sup>66</sup> See Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 172.

<sup>67</sup> But how can one infer that it has? Also, to what extent might one reasonably assume the words have accurately been preserved? Is not the best we could achieve here a kind of epistemic stalemate where either side can

argues and Dockery builds into his assertion is the fact that claim of inerrancy only being applicable to the autographs is not a cheap apologetics maneuver designed to smuggle in the notion of inerrancy via a non-falsifiable proposition; but rather, it is a theological necessity for the preservation of the veracity and truthfulness of God.<sup>68</sup>

Thirdly, the notion of proper interpretation is also a central feature of Dockery's definition that requires further elucidation. The claim here is ultimately a hermeneutical one, and in interpreting various biblical texts Dockery states that, "The author's intention must be recognized, and matters of precision and accuracy must be judged in light of the culture and means of communication that had developed by the time of the text's composition."<sup>69</sup> In other words, to judge the accuracy of a biblical author's historical account of an event using the standards of "historical accuracy" we employ today would be completely anachronistic, and finding that a biblical author has made an "error" by not using or not living up to said standards is preposterous.<sup>70</sup>

Fourthly, Dockery wants to make clear that the notion of inerrancy is relevant only in terms of the Bible's truthfulness (or falseness) and not in terms of whether there are any errors

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refute the evidence of the other but neither side can substantiate its own evidence? What hermeneutical advantages are to be gained by such a non-falsifiable position?

<sup>68</sup> While such a position might be true, Dockery et al have now made a move from Bibliology to Theology Proper to establish a foundational principle in Bibliology which then reaffirms their position in Theology Proper. Scripture cannot lie because our doctrine of God says God cannot lie and we know that this doctrine of God is correct because that is what Scripture says!

<sup>69</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 65. Inerrantists like Dockery take this cue nearly without exception from E.D. Hirsh's *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967). The issue of authorial intent is the most salient one in debates about the New Testament's use of the Old Testament with respect to the question of inerrancy.

<sup>70</sup> What I am imagining Dockery has in mind here is the notion of genre identification and the expectations that come along with such an identification. One might argue, though, that this appears to be ceding significant ground to the *human* aspect of Scripture. After all, we might not be able to hold ancient peoples to a modern standard but it does not sound preposterous to hold God to such a standard, right? Again, such a contentious implies that authorial intention can be easily and unequivocally determined and such an assertion is far from obvious.



(or lack of errors) in the text. This clarification, he writes, moves “the discussion away from grammatical mistakes or lack of precision in reports” so that the claim of inerrancy is only extended to the truthfulness of what the Bible says and not to things like exactness in reporting<sup>71</sup> and grammatical correctness.<sup>72</sup>

And finally, it is important to recognize that inerrancy is not restricted to only matters of faith and salvation,<sup>73</sup> but rather, it extends to all “areas of knowledge, since all truth is God’s truth.”<sup>74</sup> Again, though, it is important that a further clarification be made concerning this claim. Modern standards of historical or scientific accuracy that were not in place during the composition of the biblical texts are not relevant criteria in determining the inerrancy of Scripture. Rather, as Dockery notes, “matters must be analyzed in light of the author’s intended level of precision,” in addition to the overall historical and scientific conventions relevant to an author’s time period.<sup>75</sup>

What has to be underscored here is the inextricable link between inspiration and

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<sup>71</sup> See n34 of this chapter (1 Kings 4:26 and 2 Chronicles 9:25) for the kind of examples Dockery has in mind here. See also the famous example of the relationship between the account of Paul’s and Barnabas’s visit to Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-29 and the account of their visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1-10.

<sup>72</sup> Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 65. It is important to contrast the notion of truthfulness with that of error, but does this not raise as a serious question the viability of the notion of inerrancy for what Dockery wants to stipulate? It is also unclear as to why, then, Dockery would want to insist on the term “inerrancy” since it is the truthfulness of the Bible that Dockery is ultimately after. In Dockery’s defense, though, he would most likely respond that unless the Bible is inerrant one cannot assert the truthfulness of its claims

<sup>73</sup> “Partial or Limited inerrancy,” or the argument that finds contemporary currency as the notion of “infallibility,” does not require a significant discussion. By whatever name one wants to give to such a theory, the basic premise is that the Bible is true and infallible in all that it teaches with respect to “faith and salvation,” but that in areas of, say, history or science it is possible that the Bible may contain errors. Such a theory is vociferously rejected by Dockery and other inerrantists for the principal reason that it is unclear just exactly which biblical passages are explicitly irrelevant to the issue of faith and salvation. The paradigmatic example of this view is Daniel P. Fuller. See Daniel P. Fuller, “Benjamin B. Warfield’s View of Faith and History: A Critique in the Light of the New Testament.” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11:2 (Spring 1968): 75–83.

<sup>74</sup> See Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 66.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

inerrancy. It is the fact that the Bible is inspired which makes talk of an inerrant Bible possible. As Dockery notes, “Thus we see that inerrancy, as a corollary of inspiration, is a foundational issue upon which other theological building blocks are laid.”<sup>76</sup> In addition, John Warwick Montgomery confirms Dockery’s affirmation when he writes, “The contention of the present writer...is that inspiration and inerrancy cannot be separated—that like ‘love’ and ‘marriage’ in *Annie, Get Your Gun*, ‘you can’t have one without the other.’”<sup>77</sup> In short, without inspiration there can be no inerrancy. But does this mean that inspiration necessitates inerrancy? Yes, says the inerrantist. If the Scripture is God-breathed then it must be, like God, incapable of lying (or committing errors).<sup>78</sup>

### **§1.5. Defining the Parameters of Inerrancy: The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy**

While the renderings of inspiration and inerrancy provided thus far do a good job of establishing the parameters and some of the caveats to the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy, none of the definitions presented are considered generally “definitive” for inerrantists. There is, however, an understanding of inerrancy that many evangelicals do see as “close to definitive”: the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The story of the formation of the Chicago Statement is an important one for any discussion of inerrancy.<sup>79</sup> I assert this for two reasons. Firstly, the tumultuous environment that gave rise to the Chicago Statement helped to embed

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<sup>76</sup> *Christian Scripture*, 64. Again, why not just simply “truthful” in place of inerrant, though?

<sup>77</sup> See Montgomery’s “Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure” in Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 61.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Titus 1:2; Num 23:19; and John 17:17.

<sup>79</sup> Jason Sexton lists six reasons for considering the Chicago Statement as a benchmark for the discussion of inerrancy. His first states, “It is the most recent, wide-ranging, definitive attempt made by a relatively unified group of evangelicals seeking to understand and articulate inerrancy in light of non-inerrantist discounting Scripture’s authority” (27). See Jason S. Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate.” *Them* 34.1 (2009): 26-49.

within the statement itself an aura of suspicion and antagonism that characterizes much of the acrimonious debate over the evangelical doctrine of Scripture that I discuss in chapter three.

And secondly, such a position *necessarily* translates into a notion of evangelical traditioning that is dysfunctional at best and theologically debilitation at worst. I argue for both of these points in more detail in my conclusion. However, I want to conclude this chapter by quickly recounting the key events at Fuller Theological Seminary that set in motion the formulation of the Chicago Statement, discussing briefly the creation of the Chicago Statement.<sup>80</sup>

#### §1.5.1. Turmoil at Fuller Theological Seminary

Founded in 1947 by Charles E. Fuller with a curriculum initially long on apologetics and short on nearly everything else,<sup>81</sup> Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California was meant as a foray into “neoevangelicalism.”<sup>82</sup> Initially, “biblical inerrancy” was part of the doctrinal statement of the seminary. However, beginning in the early 1960s a number of faculty members, including Charles Fuller’s son, Daniel, began to question the seminary’s commitment to the doctrinal statement on inerrancy.<sup>83</sup> Daniel Fuller pushed for a new creed and in 1971 Fuller dropped any reference to inerrancy from its statement of faith.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The entire Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition is provided in Appendix A.

<sup>81</sup> As Gary Dorrien states, “the original Fuller curriculum was rather long on apologetics, especially in light of the fact that it offered no courses in Old Testament or Hebrew and barely took a pass at church history.” (52). See Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville,: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> A term coined by the seminary’s first president, Harold Ockenga meant to signal an attempt at “recovery of the high-minded Protestant orthodoxy that the previous generation of fundamentalist sectarianism and anti-intellectualism had obscured.” (Dorrien, *Remaking*, 49).

<sup>83</sup> See Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 197-219; Dorrien, *Remaking*, 95-101.

<sup>84</sup> Originally, Fuller’s Statement of Faith had a section on Scripture that read as follows: “The books which form the canon of the Old and New Testaments as originally given are plenary inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part. These books constitute the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” As of 1971, however, Fuller’s Statement of Faith replaced the above passage on Scripture with the

Fuller's abandoning of its founding commitment to inerrancy was seen as a watershed issue for inerrantists and a response was needed. Harold Lindsell, who resigned from Fuller Seminary in 1964 over the inerrancy issue, published the extremely controversial *The Battle for the Bible* in 1976. Lindsell's position of the import and ferocity of this debate over inerrancy is clearly articulated when he writes,

I regard the subject of this book, biblical inerrancy, to be the most important theological topic of this age. A great battle rages about it among the people called evangelicals...The battle that rages over the bible today centers around the question of infallibility—whether the Bible is fully or partially trustworthy...A great battle rages today around biblical infallibility among evangelicals. To ignore the battle is perilous. To come to grips with it is necessary. To fail to speak is more than cowardice; it is sinful. There comes a time when Christians must not keep silent, when to do so is far worse than to speak and risk being misunderstood or disagreed with. If we Christians do not learn from history, we are bound to repeat its mistakes.<sup>85</sup>

While taking issue with a whole cast of evangelical characters, from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to the case of Charles Augustus Briggs, it is clear that Lindsell's ire is most pronouncedly directed against Fuller Seminary. As George Marsden states, "Although addressing his work to the entire evangelical community, Lindsell left little doubt that it was

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following: "Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of this divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." For a number of conservative evangelicals, notably various members of board of Westminster Theological Seminary, the account of what happened at Fuller Seminary is read as a cautionary tale of decline within evangelicalism. See Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, preface; 23; 26. It is important to note that, for Lindsell, anyone who denied biblical inerrancy could not be properly considered an evangelical in any meaningful sense of the term.

Fuller Seminary's departure from the doctrine of inerrancy that disturbed him the most."<sup>86</sup> And Norman Geisler writes, "*The Battle for the Bible* blew the lid off the Fuller situation and labeled inerrancy a 'watershed' issue."<sup>87</sup> At the heart of the turmoil at Fuller was the question of not only what it meant to be an evangelical with respect to the authority of Scripture, but also, how evangelicals and evangelical institutions were to go about traditioning future evangelicals with respect to the authority of Scripture. It is not an overstatement to say that for a number of conservative evangelicals, the situation at Fuller was a crisis point in theological identity and was thought of as just the latest victim in the ongoing assault on evangelical bibliology. As Francis Shaffer famously quipped in 1975, "It is my conviction that the crucial area of discussion in evangelicalism in the next few years will be the Scripture. At stake is whether evangelicalism will remain evangelical."<sup>88</sup>

### §1.5.2. ICBI and the Chicago Statement

On the heels of both the events at Fuller and the publication of Lindsell's *Battle*, inerrantists began to mobilize and in 1977, seeking to stem the tide of "the erosion of the authority and accuracy of Scripture," the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) was formed and plans were made for a large summit the next year in Chicago. The summit, a virtual who's who of conservative evangelical leaders, met in 1978 from October 22-26 and the result of the summit was the production of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 279.

<sup>87</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

<sup>88</sup> *No Final Conflict: the Bible without Errors in all that it Affirms*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1975), 4.

<sup>89</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 22.

Based on a draft by R. C. Sproul, and commented on by summit attendees, the final version consists of a preamble, a short statement of five summary points, and nineteen articles of affirmation and denial.<sup>90</sup> Expressed in the propositions of the Statement are things like inspiration is restricted to the autographic texts, the role of inerrancy throughout church history, and that inerrancy applies to the whole of the Bible, not just religious and spiritual matters, but matters of history and science that correlate to the teachings in the Bible on these subject, and my detailed explication of the practice of traditioning based off of the Statement is discussed in chapter three.

### **§1.6. Conclusion**

My central focus in this chapter was to give a comprehensive overview of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an expression of evangelical Bibliology. I discussed three approaches within evangelicalism to understanding the process of inscripturation, citing that verbal plenary inspiration was as the model most frequently employed by evangelicals. I also examined the biblical foundation for both this understanding of inscripturation and its corollary the doctrine of inerrancy by looking at 2 Timothy 3:16, specifically focusing on the Greek word *theopneustos* as “God-breathed.” I then concluded this chapter by working through various iterations of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, ultimately ending with a discussion of what contemporary evangelicals generally consider to be the best expression of the doctrine of inerrancy: the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

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<sup>90</sup> Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 25-27.

## CHAPTER TWO: QUESTIONING INERRANCY IN EVANGELICAL TRADITIONING: PETER ENNS' BIBLIOLOGY

### §2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, my primary focus is to explore the central arguments presented in Peter Enns' controversy *Inspiration and Incarnation* in order to demonstrate how they offer a conception of evangelical traditioning that directly challenges the doctrine of inerrancy. In order to illustrate this point, though, I first give an overall account of the central argument in Enns' work: the incarnational model of Scripture, noting how Enns' model requires evangelicals to abandon a preexistent *theological* position on what the Bible should be and adopt a more historically nuanced position on what the Bible actually is. Next, I discuss the human element of Scripture by looking at what it means to contextualize Scripture within an Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) framework. And finally, I explain how Enns conceives of a notion of evangelical traditioning that while committed to the centrality of Scripture, nonetheless directly challenges the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy discussed in the previous chapter.

### §2.2. The Challenge of Critical Scholarship for Evangelicalism

In his magnum opus, *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge ends his chapter on the Protestant Rule of Faith with the following:

The fact that all the *true* people of God in every age and in every part of the Church, in the exercise of their private judgment, in accordance with the simple rules above stated, agree as to the meaning of Scripture in all things necessary either in faith or practice, is a

decisive proof of the perspicuity of the Bible, and of the safety of allowing the people the enjoyment of the divine right of private judgment.<sup>1</sup>

For Hodge, the aforementioned quotation highlights two important aspects, namely, the accessibility and clarity of the Bible to the people of God at all times and in all places—what Hodge means here through his use of “perspicuity”—and the truthfulness of the Bible “in all things necessary either in faith or practice.” However, as Mark Noll states, “Hodge, as it happens, also believed that the [B]ible was true about everything else.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, for Hodge, “Biblical language was thus sacrosanct and fixed in a way that broached no compromise to considerations of time and place. One did not need to take into account the points of view of various biblical writers, their settings, or their motivations for writing a given passage or book. Their words were what was important, timeless words that were immutable in their meanings.”<sup>3</sup>

The problem with this understanding of Scripture is that even if it represented a general church-wide understanding of Scripture in the nineteenth century—which it arguably did not—it does not accurately reflect anything like a general twenty-first century understanding of Scripture where great emphasis is placed on the *ancient context* within which the biblical texts were written. However, locating the various biblical texts within their ancient contexts and placing them alongside the plethora of scientific and archaeological insights we have gained over the last one hundred and fifty years presents a significant challenge to the “common sense” or “literal” approach to Scriptural understanding advocated by Hodge.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1884), 188, my emphasis. A rather astounding claim that even at a cursory glance appears to be highly suspect.

<sup>2</sup> Noll, *Faith and Criticism*, 144.

<sup>3</sup> Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 275. It is important to note just how much the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy has amended Hodge’s position.



This does not mean, though, that evangelicals have ubiquitously shied away from engaging with critical scholarship. According to Mark Noll, a wave of evangelical intellectuals began attending non-evangelical schools of higher education in the mid-1930s, right at the end of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. In fact, from the mid-1930s-1960, fifteen prominent scholars responsible for the subsequent development of evangelical biblical scholarship attended graduate school at Harvard University.<sup>4</sup> While two of these scholars, George Ladd and Paul Jewett were instrumental in shaping the “progressive evangelicalism” at Fuller Theological Seminary that, beginning in the 1960s, culminated in a change to Fuller’s doctrinal statement in 1971,<sup>5</sup> Roger Nicole and Kenneth Kantzer became conservative evangelical heavyweights.<sup>6</sup> However, it remains an open question whether or not the issues raised and conclusions drawn by critical scholarship might be compatible with evangelical commitments to the doctrine of inerrancy. A recent attempt at integrating an evangelical doctrine of Scripture and critical scholarship was made by former Westminster Theological Seminary professor Peter Enns, and the next section of this chapter examines Enns’ approach to this project.

### **§2.3. Peter Enns and the Challenge of Critical Scholarship for Evangelical Bibliology**

Educated at Messiah College, Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS), and Harvard University, Peter Enns taught at WTS from 1994-2008, serving from 2005-2008 as professor of

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<sup>4</sup> Noll, *Faith and Criticism*, 97.

<sup>5</sup> The definitive work on Fuller Seminary is still George M. Marsden’s *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987). See especially pp. 213, 277-286).

<sup>6</sup> For example, Kantzer was editor of *Christianity Today* and as the second dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL, he “transformed Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from a small denominational Bible institute into a major seminary.” See Noll, *Faith and Criticism*, 98.

Old Testament and Hermeneutics. An expert on Wisdom Literature, his dissertation, under the guidance of famed Hebrew Bible scholar James L. Kugel, is entitled, “Exodus retold: Ancient exegesis of the departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15-21 and 19:1-9.” While he has published more than a dozen books and numerous articles, he is best known in evangelical circles for his 2005 work, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (I&I).<sup>7</sup>

The publication of I&I created a bit of a firestorm within the evangelical community and ultimately culminated with Enns being suspended from WTS, leading to his departure from the seminary on August 1, 2008.<sup>8</sup> I&I is a relatively short book (197 pages) consisting of five chapters. According to the book’s publisher, BakerAcademic, I&I

is an important reconsideration of evangelical perspectives on scriptural authority, particularly in light of recent Old Testament (OT) scholarship. His concern is to help readers whose faith has been challenged by critical studies. He suggests that evangelicals need to move beyond a merely defensive doctrine of Scripture and develop a positive view that seriously engages contemporary critical scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

While this is a completely accurate description of the text, BakerAcademic’s presentation of the three central issues raised by Enns that comprise the substance of his text, chapters 2-4, is not.

The publishers write,

Enns looks at three broad issues raised by biblical scholars that seem to threaten traditional views of Scripture:

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<sup>7</sup> From this point on I will simply refer to this text as I&I.

<sup>8</sup> See Ted Olsen, “Enns and WTS Official Part Ways.” *Christianity Today*, July 23, 2008 available at: [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/07/enns\\_and\\_wts\\_of.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/07/enns_and_wts_of.html). A discussion of the so-called Peter Enns Controversy is the focus of my third chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from BakerAcademic’s description of the book on their website at: <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/inspiration-and-incarnation/229450>

- (1) Parallels with ancient Near Eastern literature that call into question Scripture's uniqueness
- (2) Theological diversity in the Old Testament that calls into question Scripture's trustworthiness
- (3) Unusual uses of the Old Testament by New Testament writers that call into question Scripture's authority.”<sup>10</sup>

With such missives aimed at the heart of evangelical theology one would certainly expect the book's release to result in a rather nasty fight within evangelicalism. However, Enns' actual treatment of the three topics outlined above is a far cry from the sound bites being described above. I&I *never* denies the the trustworthiness or the authority of Scripture at any level, and Enns' discussion of the uniqueness of Scripture is much more nuanced than the above statements implies. In fact, in the list of endorsements right below Baker Academic's description of the book, H.G.M. Williamson writes, “At last, here is a constructive exploration—by an evangelical scholar with a high view of Scripture—of how to handle seriously the evidence from inside and outside the Bible that sits uncomfortably with classic formulations.”<sup>11</sup> Hardly the endorsement one would expect of a book aimed at calling into question Scripture's authority!

What is accurate to say is that the book calls into question certain evangelical solutions to the vexing problems presented by critical OT scholarship, and the text insists that, in light of critical OT scholarship, an adjustment to the traditional evangelical doctrine of what divinely inspired Scripture is to look and act like needs to be made. Though not mentioned explicitly by name, it is apparent that I&I has in mind the evangelical commitment to biblical inerrancy as one of the

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/inspiration-and-incarnation/229450>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

doctrines it seeks to challenge. As Enns writes, “The Bible is central to their lives, but sometimes evangelical defenses of the Bible are exercises in special pleading, attempts to hold on to comfortable ideas [e.g. inerrancy?] despite evidence that makes such ideas problematic.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand how I&I presents a challenge to the evangelical doctrine of biblical inerrancy, I first give an overview of the general argument developed in I&I. Next, I give particular attention to the first of Enns’ broad themes in I&I—the relationship between the OT and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature—by focusing on the question of whether myth is an appropriate genre category for describing portions of the OT.<sup>13</sup> I then examine, albeit briefly, some of the challenges posed to an inerrantist doctrine of Scripture by some of the tensions and ambiguities present in the OT. And finally, I give an account of both an Ennsian approach to evangelical traditioning based on the previous two sections and how this approach to traditioning challenges the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy.

### §2.3.1. I&I: General Argument

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<sup>12</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 15, my emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> My rationale for focusing solely on this portion of I&I is two-fold. Firstly, this section contains Enns’ most contested treatment of Bibliology. And secondly, the question of the NT’s use of the OT could actually be umbrellaed under the discussion of the ANE context of Scripture since it is a particular example of just such a practice—i.e. reading Scripture within its ANE context. It is important to say something here about Enns’ overall contention this section, though. For Enns, the NT writers read the OT “*Christotelicly*.” Introduced in I&I, Enns offers a more complete picture of *Christotelic* in his “Fuller Meaning, Single Goal,” stating “A Christotelic approach is an attempt to look at the centrality of Christ for hermeneutics in a slightly different way. [not seeing Christ on every page] It asks not so much, ‘How does this OT passage, episode, figure, etc., *lead* to Christ?’ To read the OT ‘Christotelicly’ is to read it already knowing that Christ is somehow the *end (telos)* to which the OT story is heading; in other words, to read the OT in light of the exclamation point of the history of revelation, the death and resurrection of Christ” (214). While Enns’ focus on a Christotelic is commended by many, including G.K. Beale, it is his coupling of this assertion with the NT writers use of Second Temple Jewish hermeneutical practices that presented concerns for some inerrantists.

See Peter Enns, “Fuller Meaning, Single Goal: A Christotelic Approach to the New Testament Use of the Old in its First-Century Interpretive Environment” in Stanley N. Gundry et al., eds., *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 167-217.

For Enns, the focus of *I&I* is to “(1) to bring together a variety of data that biblical scholars work with every day for readers who do not have firsthand familiarity with these data and (2) to look at these data with a clear view toward discussing their implications for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup> Three important points need to be made about Enns’ focus in *I&I*. The first point is the issue of audience. Enns’ purpose here is not to write a densely packed, theoretical treatise on scholarly minutia for members of the academy; rather, his focus here is for general consumption, a primarily lay readership interested in questions about the Bible and what modern biblical scholars say about the Bible.

The second point deals with both audience and objective. While Enns’ general audience is anyone who has questions about the Bible, he is chiefly interested in targeting his book to a particular type of evangelical. On August 13, 2008, Enns gave an interview to NPR’s *Radio Times* on Philadelphia’s WHYY-FM, hosted by Marty Moss-Coane.<sup>15</sup> In this interview, Enns explained that he wrote *I&I* to “benefit mainly younger evangelicals but also others who lose their faith essentially over some difficult issues that have arisen in the history of modern biblical criticism” and that his audience “was, and still is, those types of people who are unsatisfied, for whatever reason, with rather traditional answers to more contemporary and difficult kinds of questions.”<sup>16</sup> For Enns, there has been a lack of conversation between evangelicals and modern biblical scholarship and this has led to the dilemma of “familiar and conventional [evangelical] approaches” not satisfactorily addressing a number of the contemporary problems raised by

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<sup>14</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> The interview can be found online at: [http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns\\_radio\\_times\\_interview.mp3](http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns_radio_times_interview.mp3).

<sup>16</sup> [http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns\\_radio\\_times\\_interview.mp3](http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns_radio_times_interview.mp3).

critical scholarship for a number of evangelicals.<sup>17</sup>

The final point is that Enns is not attempting to present “anything new under the sun.” Rather, his aim throughout *I&I* is “synthesis, not novelty, for people who have very good and difficult questions about the Bible but who may not have a theological paradigm from which to work through some of these questions.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, he seeks to provide an accessible entry point to critical scholarship to people who otherwise would neither have access to nor the technical expertise to navigate through, said material.

In *I&I*, Enns’ primary goal is to bring evangelicalism into conversation with critical scholarship in hopes of demonstrating what an evangelical doctrine of Scripture as the Word of God that engages with critical scholarship could look like.<sup>19</sup> Now, while Enns is not suggesting that evangelicalism needs to completely abandon its doctrine of Scripture, he does say, “when new evidence comes to light, or old evidence is seen in a new light, we must be willing to engage that evidence and adjust our doctrine accordingly.”<sup>20</sup> In short, for Enns, an evangelical doctrine of Scripture must be able to articulate the Bible as the Word of God not in terms of well-worn evangelical mantras, but rather, in terms of how we understand the Bible *now*, in light of the implications of a hundred plus years of critical scholarship..

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<sup>17</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. Enns recently completed a commentary on Ecclesiastes and I couldn’t resist the Qoheleth reference. I’ve deleted this comment in my final version of the dissertation ☺.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the incorporation of critical scholarship alongside a “high view of Scripture” is neither something new to evangelicalism nor is it something completely new to WTS. See Noll, *Faith and Criticism*, esp. 122-141. See also John J. Yeo’s fantastic study of Old Testament scholarship at WTS from 1929-1998 in his *Plundering the Egyptians: The Old Testament and Historical Criticism at Westminster Theological Seminary (1929-1998)*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 14. The notion of adjusting one’s doctrinal commitments in light of scholarly findings is a salient point for Enns in *I&I*. He makes this point explicitly when he writes, “In my view, however, what is needed is not simply for evangelical to work *in* these areas [e.g. archeological, historical, and textual studies], but to engage the *doctrinal implications* that work in these areas raises.” (*I&I*, 13, author’s emphasis)

For example, think in terms of what it means to say the Bible is the Word of God and Genesis 1 is to be read as myth instead of what it means to say the Bible is the Word of God and Genesis 1 is to be read as actual history. In both cases we are contending that the Bible is the Word of God, but how the very *Word* of God is transmitted, how it is to be read and understood, is radically different in each of the aforementioned scenarios. For some, the notion that the Bible contains “myth” is hard to simultaneously accept with the Bible being the Word of God, but, as Enns states in his opening chapter of *I&I*, “*The problems many of us feel regarding the Bible may have less to do with the Bible itself and more to do with our own preconceptions.*”<sup>21</sup>

This does not mean that engaging with critical scholarship is less than challenging for evangelicals. However, for Enns, such challenges are necessary if evangelicals are “to bring the evangelical doctrine of Scripture into conversation with the implications generated by some important themes in modern biblical scholarship—particularly Old Testament scholarship—over the past 150 years.”<sup>22</sup> But how, exactly, are evangelicals to engage with such scholarship? After all, as Enns asks in his concluding chapter of *I&I*, “How do [evangelicals] incorporate certain data with full integrity without sacrificing the truth that the Bible is God’s book for his people?” The answer for Enns is to think in terms of how “the incarnation of Christ helps us to build a better model for the inspiration of Scripture.”<sup>23</sup> Just as it is understood that Christ is the word incarnate, simultaneously fully human and fully divine, so too can we make a parallel to the Bible as God’s incarnate Word, simultaneously fully human and fully divine. Understanding Scripture in incarnational terms is not something Enns has simply invented. As noted in chapter

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<sup>21</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 15, author’s emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 167

one, Warfield's idea of *concursum* invites a parallel between the nature of Scripture and the logic of the doctrine of the Incarnation. While this view of Scripture is not theological analogous to the doctrine of the Incarnation in either Enns' or Warfield's view, a comparison between the two, for heuristic purposes, does seem to be apropos.

Enns uses the incarnational analogy to draw attention to both the divine and human elements that simultaneously coexist in Scripture. For Enns, though, this means that understanding the human, sociohistorical context—the ANE context—within which the OT was produced is essential for our understanding of the Bible itself *as the Word of God*. As Enns says,

[The Bible] belonged in the ancient worlds that produced it. It was not an abstract, otherworldly book, dropped out of heaven. It was *connected to* and therefore *spoke to* those ancient cultures. The encultured qualities of the Bible, therefore, are not extra elements that we can discard to get to the real point, the timeless truth. Rather, precisely because Christianity is a historical religion, God's word reflects the various historical moments in which Scripture was written.<sup>24</sup>

Precisely because the OT is written within an ANE context, complete with all the cultural trappings of the ANE, it is incumbent upon anyone who wishes to comprehend what is being said in the Bible to have a general understanding of the cultural language within which the text is written. In sum, for Enns, just as we talk about Jesus as a first century Jew who is simultaneously Immanuel (God with us), so too should we think of the OT as the divine inspired Word of God communicated through the cultural milieus and conventions of its ANE context. Just as Jesus speaks in a way that is comprehensible in first century Palestine, so too does the OT “speak” in a way that is comprehensible with its ANE context. Need this

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<sup>24</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 18.



fundamentally conflict with a view of the centrality of Scripture? Absolutely not, says Enns. However, it does absolutely necessitate sincere reflection and even doctrinal adjustments on the part of evangelicals when developments in modern biblical scholarship warrant such considerations. And, for Enns, this is the ultimate point he is trying to make in I&I.

### §2.3.2. I&I: Human Element of Scripture: The Uniqueness of Scripture

A good degree of the tension over the issue of inerrancy can be found in the relationship between the *divine* element of Scripture and the *human* element of Scripture. On the one hand, it is essential to emphasize the divine inspiration of Scripture. However, following Warfield's notion of *concursum*, on the other hand, it is just as important to not discount Scripture's literary production by human authors within a specific geographical location at a particular time. Since inerrantists nearly ubiquitously deny a mechanical dictation view of inspiration, there can be little doubt that various elements of the human character of Scripture (e.g. sociohistorical literary conventions) are present in Scripture. This is even affirmed by inerrantists in Article VIII of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy which reads "*WE AFFIRM* that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. *WE DENY* that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities" (my emphasis).

However, perhaps my aforementioned understanding of Article VIII reads more into "literary styles" than is intended by its author(s). After all, might not "literary styles" be read as a psychological category, referring to one's own particular preferences in terms of word choice or syntax and not to a sociohistorical category? I would disagree with such a reading for two reasons. Firstly, it seems more appropriate that such considerations would be best bracketed

under “distinctive personalities” instead of “literary styles.” And secondly, such a reading would imply that one’s literary style could be wholly divorced from any trace of one’s sociohistorical context, meaning that one could reasonably ignore an author’s sociohistorical context when attempting to determine the author’s literary style. Inferring a separation between one’s psychology and one’s socio-history context appears to me to be utterly problematic, to say the least, and I see no reason to entertain such a possibility.

Consider the following from R.C. Sproul. As Sproul states in *Explaining Inerrancy*, Article VIII deals with the question of omniscience. Sproul writes, “Thus we say that though the biblical writings are inspired, this does not imply that the biblical writers knew everything there was to be known or that that they were infallible of themselves.”<sup>25</sup> Since there is no expectation here of the biblical authors having comprehensive knowledge, is it improbably to suggest that their writings would be circumscribed by the nuances embedded within their particularly located sociohistorical context? I do not believe that such a contention is improbably; in fact, I think that this is exactly what we do find within the biblical writings.

In addition, as I mentioned in chapter one, inerrantists also claim that the Bible speaks without error not only on matters of spiritual or redemptive themes, but also on matters of history and science. As the Chicago Statement’s denial in Article XII states, “*WE DENY* that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.” Explicit in this denial is the argument that Scripture *does* speak on matters of history and

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<sup>25</sup> See R.C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 30.

science, and that when it does so it is “free from all falsehood, fraud and deceit.”<sup>26</sup> A tension possibly exists, however, between how one understands the literary styles used by biblical authors and the simultaneous claim that not only does the Bible speak on historical and scientific matters, but that it does so free from any sort of error. Does this mean that Joshua’s destruction of Hazor is not only a matter of historical “fact,” but also actually happened in exactly the way that it is reported to have happened in Joshua 11:10-11? While the affirmation of Article IX in the Chicago Statement contends that, “*WE AFFIRM* that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write,” does this necessarily mean that it is proper to *interpret*, say, the account of Joshua’s destruction of Hazor and the creation narrative in Genesis 1 as statements of *historical fact*?

Let us look at the aforementioned examples in more detail. Joshua 11:10-11 reads: “<sup>10</sup>Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king [King Jabin of Hazor] down with the sword. Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms. <sup>11</sup>And they put to the sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire.” However, compare this with Judges 4:3-24 which reads “<sup>23</sup>So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. <sup>24</sup>Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.” Scholars generally argue that Judges 4 is the basis for the narrative in Joshua, and the account of the destruction is a significantly debated subject in biblical archaeology.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Chicago Statement, affirmation of Article XII.

<sup>27</sup> See Noah Wiener, “Scorched Wheat May Provide Answers on the Destruction of Canaanite Tel Hazor.” July 24, 2012. Available online at: <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/news/scorched-wheat-may-provide-answers-on-the-destruction-of-canaanite-tel-hazor/>

It is also important to take note of the possibility that the above account in Joshua 11 reflects not simply the reporting of fact but the presentation of historiography. As Enns notes, “Historiography is not the mere *statement* of facts but the *shaping* of these facts for a particular *purpose*.”<sup>28</sup> In this case, then, perhaps the account of Hazor serves as the culminating feat in the “conquest” of Canaan which began at Jericho (6:24), moved to Ai (8:8, 19), and culminated in the events at Hazor. If this is the case, though, is it really correct to say that the author of Joshua is simply reporting historical facts? For Enns, to acknowledge biblical historiography does not threaten the divinely inspired nature of Scripture, though. As he states, “What makes biblical historiography the word of God is not that it is somehow immune from such things. It is God’s word because it is—and this is how God did it. To be able to *confess* that the Bible is God’s word is the gift of faith. To *understand* this confession is an ongoing process of greater clarification and insight, a process that will not end.”<sup>29</sup>

But what about the creation account in Genesis 1? Consider what Meredith G. Kline, an Old Testament scholar at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1948-1977, argued: “While the six days of creation are presented as normal solar days, according to framework interpretation the total picture of God creating His creative work in a week of days is not meant to be taken literally. Instead it functions as a literary structure in which the creative works of God have been narrated in topical order.” Kline is an important figure here because he readily argued for an inerrant Scripture, stating that “if the inspired text did teach us that creation was a recent event, we would be bound to accept this teaching as absolute truth on the basis of divine revelation.”

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<sup>28</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 60.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 67 (author’s emphasis)

Kline stated, however, like John H. Walton more recently, that the Bible is simply silent with regard to the age of the earth or its material creation. The point of Genesis 1 is therefore not scientific, but rather, kerygmatic (a theological proclamation) and it would be a misreading of God's inerrant word to read it as historical fact?<sup>30</sup>

The tension between, on the one hand, the need for the Bible to be free of errors in all that it purports, including on matters of history and science, and, on the other hand, the reliance of the biblical author's own ancient literary conventions that seemingly fail to exhaustively communicate matters of history and science without error is a paramount tension in the inerrancy debate. It is also one of the most prominent (and most contentious) aspects of Enns' I&I, and a detailed account of his understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and ANE literature is critical to understand Enns' overall argument in the text.

Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, archaeologists discovered an abundance of ANE documents. A profound example was in 1849-1853 when Austen Henry Layard and Hormuzd Rassam unearthed the Library of Ashurbanipal in the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh, the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, located right outside the present-day city of Mosul, Iraq. Contained within the library were thousands of clay tablets and fragments written in what would become known as Akkadian, the language of ancient Assyria and Babylon. The discovered tablets contained a variety of texts, but it was the religious texts, most notably the *Enuma Elish* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, that would prove most challenging for evangelical

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<sup>30</sup> See *The G3N3S1S Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*. ed. David G. Hagopian. (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, Inc. 2001), 218-219, and John H. Walton. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

biblical studies.<sup>31</sup>

The problem created for evangelicals with the discovery of these texts is that they call into question the *uniqueness* of the OT as God's special revelation. For example, the *Enuma Elish* is referred to as the "Babylonian Genesis," and while exhibiting significant difference from the Genesis 1 account of creation, it also shares a number of similarities such as the division of the waters above and below the firmament, the existence of light before the sun, moon, and stars are created, etc.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* narrates the story of a cataclysmic flood in Tablet XI that shares similarities with the biblical account in Genesis 6-8.<sup>33</sup> However, if similarities are found between, say, the biblical narratives of creation and the flood and other ANE accounts then how can one rightfully talk about the uniqueness of various OT narratives?

According to Enns, the question of how to handle examples of ANE literature that demonstrate similarities to biblical accounts has created two different camps in evangelicalism. A more "liberal" camp sought to make the historical context of the Bible, newly illuminated by examples of ANE literature like the *Enuma Elish*, the essential determining factor of what the Bible is, i.e. the Bible is just another example of ANE literature. Instead of emphasizing the cultural aspect of the Bible set forth by the newly discovered ANE literature, a more "conservative" camp entrenched itself within the traditional evangelical doctrine of the Bible as the revealed word of God, historically accurate in all its assertions and unique as the revealed

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<sup>31</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 24-25. A recent and very readable narrative about the discovery of the Library of Ashurbanipal in general and the Epic of Gilgamesh in particular is David Damrosch's *The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>33</sup> See Enns, *I&I*, 27-29. For a thorough account of the history of the flood narrative in *The Gilgamesh Epic* see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 214-240.

word of God.<sup>34</sup>

For Enns, however, the appropriate answer of what to do with ANE “parallels” to biblical narratives is found somewhere in between the liberal and conservative responses. In fact, Enns wants to not simply move between the “liberal” and “conservative” divide that he sees existing in discussions about the relationship between the OT and ANE literature, but rather, he seeks to move beyond the divide. The major problem with this divide, according to Enns, has to do with a premise about what divine revelation is to look like, namely, that “revelation is by its nature unique, meaning that revelation [Scripture] will *necessarily* be *thoroughly* distinct from the surrounding culture.”<sup>35</sup> According to Enns, both conservatives and liberals operate under the aforementioned premise about the uniqueness of Scripture. Therefore, parallels between the OT and ANE literature are both *dismissed* by conservatives who retreat into a defensive posture in order to retain the *doctrinal* assertion that Scripture is divine revelation, and *overemphasized* by liberals who are forced to see Scripture as a chiefly *cultural product*, and as such, the OT is “not unique in any recognizable way.” After all, one might argue, look at all the direct parallels we can draw between the OT and ANE literature. What is *unique* about that?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 47. The division between liberal/conservative camps within evangelicalism can be understood as the theological equivalent of the partisan rancor that currently infects much of American politics. In either instance, attaching labels like liberal or conservative/traditional or progressive to ideas (or persons) is frequently used as a means of summarily discrediting said ideas (or persons) within one’s particular camp. While there is nothing novel in this tactic, and entire educational institutions have been built on said method (i.e. Westminster Theological Seminary), it is my contention that there is also nothing intellectually productive or honest in such an approach. Furthermore, I see Enns as seeking to put forth an appealing remedy to the theological either/or dichotomy of liberal/conservative that he sees within evangelicalism. For an excellent recent example of this dichotomy, see Gerald R. McDermott, “The Emerging Divide in Evangelical Theology,” *JETS* 56:2 (June 2013): 355-378.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 42 (author’s emphasis).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43. While Enns does not actually locate any particular scholar in the conservative or liberal camps, it seems apparent that he is alluding to the rabid defended of biblical inerrancy on the conservative side, and the far reaches of neo-orthodoxy on the liberal side.

Enns suggests that the way out of this conservative/liberal impasse is to reimagine what it means to talk about the uniqueness of Scripture. As he writes, “What needs to be [questioned] is the assumption that *both* sides [liberal and conservative] of the argument are making, namely, that the situated/enculturated nature of the Bible poses a problem to the definition of divine revelation.”<sup>37</sup> For Enns, then, the central problem concerning the uniqueness of Scripture has less to do with the evidence culled from ANE literature and more to do with our expectations of what the uniqueness of God’s written revelation *must* look like. As Enns writes, “In other words, the assumptions we have about the nature of God (which include notions of revelation and inspiration), what constitutes reality, what is good history writing, and so on, will largely determine *how* we understand the evidence.”<sup>38</sup> Because presumptions on the above matters are rooted in our own historical moment and not in the historical moment of the biblical authors, what the late nineteenth century discoveries of ANE literature allow us to do is to better acculturate ourselves to the historical moment of the biblical authors. As Enns says, “both Genesis and *Enuma Elish* ‘breath the same air’...[therefore] the Genesis account must be understood in its ancient context, and stories like *Enuma Elish* help us glimpse what that context looked like.”<sup>39</sup>

As stated earlier, for Enns, extrabiblical archeological and textual evidence (i.e. ANE literature) should be wholly relevant to how evangelicals understand what the Bible *is* and is *about* today. Yet, this does not mean that Enns is calling for evangelicals to view the Bible as nothing more than a literary product of the ANE. However, neither is Enns saying that

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<sup>37</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 48 (author’s emphasis)

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



evangelicals can completely ignore the embeddedness of the Bible in its ANE world for the sake of defending their traditional formulations of the utter uniqueness of Scripture. Swinging this pendulum too far in either direction stagnates evangelicalism within the intractable “liberal/conservative” impasse that Enns is so ardently trying to move beyond. For Enns, then, what is needed instead is a model that allows us to understand what is special about God’s divine word without discounting the ancient human context through which God’s word is revealed.

For Enns, the answer lies in looking at the incarnation as a model for how we are to understand Scripture in its ANE context. As Enns notes, “a contemporary evangelical doctrine of Scripture must account for the Old Testament as an [ANE] phenomenon by going beyond the mere *observation* of that fact to allowing that fact to affect how we think about Scripture. A doctrine of Scripture that does not think through this incarnational dimension [i.e. that God’s word is expressed through the *human* conventions of the ANE] is inadequate in light of the evidence we have.”<sup>40</sup> That being said though, what does it mean in practice to allow the ANE context of the OT to inform our doctrine of Scripture? Perhaps the best way to test Enns’ incarnational model of Scripture is to see how it offers an explanation for one of the most difficult issues arising with contextualizing the OT within its ANE context: the OT’s apparent use of myth.

### §2.3.3. I&I: Human Element of Scripture: The Question of Myth

Like inerrancy, defining *myth* is not nearly as straightforward as it would appear. Our general way of understanding myths is to treat them as fanciful, fictitious stories which are at home more in the land of make believe than they are to sacred religious texts, especially to God’s divine

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<sup>40</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 67.

word as recorded in the Bible. However, as mentioned previously, the number of myths from the ANE discovered at the close of the nineteenth century that parallel portions of the biblical account in Genesis forces us to reconsider not only how we understand the function of myths but also the role that myths might play in the Bible. In fact, it is vital to not equate the word myth with false when one is considering the academic study of religions and religious texts.<sup>41</sup> As Enns cautions his readers, “It is important to understand, however, that not all historians of the [ANE] use the word *myth* simply as shorthand for ‘untrue,’ ‘made-up,’ ‘storybook.’ It may include these ideas for some, but many who use the term are trying to get at something deeper.”<sup>42</sup>

What is that something deeper that scholars are trying to get at, though? For Enns, that something deeper has to do with an understanding of ultimate origins. Enns defines myth as “*an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who are we? Where do we come from?*”<sup>43</sup> A few caveats are in order here in unpacking this definition. Enns’ view of myth is both historical and functional, meaning that he locates myths within given historical moments—ancient, premodern—as well as viewing them in terms of the operations they perform, namely to speak to questions of ultimate origin and significance. This is important because, while like science, myths seek to answer questions about the ultimate origins of, say, humanity or the cosmos, they do so in a distinctly *prescientific* way, denoting that the level of precision or accuracy we would expect from scientific answers to these questions will *not* be present in myths.<sup>44</sup> As Enns says, “Ancient peoples were not concerned to

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<sup>41</sup> See Ninian Smarat, *The Religious Experience*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McMillian Publishing Co., 1991), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 40 (author’s emphasis)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> For an important example of the explanatory function of myth is appears to be undergirding Enns’ understanding see Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. 2 Vols. (New York: Harper, 1958).

describe the universe in scientific terms. In fact, to put the matter more strongly: scientific investigation was not at the disposal of [ANE] peoples.”<sup>45</sup>

Needless to say, Enns’ definition of myth is not the only one with scholarly currency. In fact, I argue that Mircea Eliade’s definition of myth is better suited to illustrate the connection between the myths of the ANE and their biblical parallels. Eliade, who readily acknowledged the problematic nature of even attempting to define myth, proposed that,

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the ‘beginning’...In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthrough of the sacred (or the ‘supernatural’) into the world. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really *establishes* the world and makes it what it is today.<sup>46</sup>

The benefits of Eliade’s definition of myth over Enns’ are twofold. Firstly, Eliade’s definition explicitly discusses the “breakthrough of the sacred” into the everyday world in terms of explaining how and why the world is what it is today. This intercession of the sacred not only explains question like “who we are?” and “where do we come from?” but also provides an account of the question of “how we relate and are related to the sacred itself?” And secondly, such an explanation seems more apt with comparisons to the incarnational model of Scripture that Enns’ is proposing than is his more naturalistic, phenomena-driven definition of myth.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly enough, I do not actually think Enns would disagree with me on this point. A

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<sup>45</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Enns’ understanding of myth reads more like pre-scientific science than it does a narration of a group’s sacred history. It is also important to note, though, that Enns has very little vested in the term myth itself. He writes, “If some consensus could be reached for an alternative term, it would seem profitable to abandon the word *myth* altogether since the term has such a long history of meanings attached to it, which prejudices the discussion from the outset.” (*I&I*, 50). It is not clear to me that there is a better term, though.

narrative describing the redemptive history of God's condescension into human flesh—the story of the incarnation—just seems to be better articulated through the parameters of Eliade's definition of myth than it is through Enns'. My point here is not to pick a fight with Enns' definition; rather, it is simply to offer the best possible understanding of myth that will allow us to see the interconnection between myth in the ANE and myth in the Bible, which is, after all, Enns' central point here.

Like the notion of the uniqueness of Scripture, Enns argues that the question of the relationship between myth in the ANE and myth in the Bible also leads to an unnecessary divide in evangelicalism. On the conservative (or what we might call “traditional”) side of the equation we might have something like the following: “God's word articulates truth; historical, accurate truth, not myth.” While on the liberal (or what we might call “progressive”) side of the equation we have something like “Well, this is an example of myth and myth is not inspired. Therefore, what we have again is another cultural product, not the word of God.”

Enns wants to push back against this dualistic thinking by asking why “myth” is necessarily contrary to God's word? Enns writes, “But one might ask why it is that God can't use the category ‘myth’ to speak to ancient Israelites.”<sup>48</sup> After all, given the cultural embeddedness of the Bible within the ANE, why wouldn't we expect the word of God to be transmitted through the conceptual framework best understood by an ANE culture, even if that framework was fundamentally *mythic* in orientation? As Enns says, “This is surely what it means for God to reveal himself to people—he accommodates, condescends, meets them where they are. The phrase word of God does not imply disconnectedness to its environment.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 56.

For Enns, though, the resistance to this type of thinking goes back to our preconceptions of what God or the Bible should or should not do. For many, then, it is simply incomprehensible that God or the Bible communicates through mythology. As Robert A. Oden, Jr. states, “This refusal is fundamentally grounded in the assumption that all things biblical must be firmly and forever distinguished from the nonbiblical and, especially, the mythological world. The forcefulness of this foundational and long unquestioned distinction accounts for the otherwise inexplicable desire to divide the OT from myth.”<sup>50</sup>

According to Enns, we are no longer in a position to completely disjoin the OT from ANE mythology. He states, “I reject the notion that a modern doctrine of Scripture can be articulated in blissful isolation from the evidence we have.”<sup>51</sup> And the evidence we have points to similar conceptual framework shared by the OT authors and their ANE counterparts. But how does such a recognition not ultimately lead one away from evangelical confessions to confessing apostasy? The answer for Enns lies in what it is that makes the Bible a thoroughly *unique* example of ANE literature: its incarnational model. As Enns states, “[The Bible’s] uniqueness is seen not in holding human cultures at arm’s length, but in the belief that Scripture is the only book in which God speaks incarnate. As it is with Christ, so it is with the Bible—the ‘coming together’ of the divine and human sets it apart from all others.”<sup>52</sup> I take this to mean, then, that for Enns it is the dual nature of the Bible—a divine message conveyed via thoroughly human language—that sets the Bible apart from other ANE literature such as *Enuma Elish* or the Epic of Gilgamesh.

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<sup>50</sup> See his “Myth and Mythology.” ABD, Vol. IV, 960.

<sup>51</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 168.

Enns further elucidates this point by describing what *kind* of Scripture we should anticipate from his incarnational model, stating, “simply put, an incarnational model of Scripture is one that expects Scripture to have an *unapologetically thorough* human dimension analogous to Jesus’ complete humanity. Both the human dimension of Scripture and the humanity of Jesus are *essential* to making them what they are.”<sup>53</sup> This does not mean either that Scripture is divorced from its ANE context or that it is simply reducible to its ANE context. Instead, it contends that while the cultural mechanisms of Israel’s ANE context (i.e. literary genres of myth, etc.) are the vehicles through which God’s word is expressed, there remains something wholly distinct about the content of Israel’s message: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” (Deuteronomy 6:4 (NRSV)).

What the incarnational model of the Old Testament allows for is a written text that, while fully acculturated within the literary customs of its historical context, is also fully unique in the content of the message that is being conveyed through those customs. As Enns writes, “God *transformed* the ancient myths so that Israel’s story would come to focus on its God, the real one.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, God’s “dramatic breakthrough” into the world is made comprehensible to Israel solely through an ANE conceptual framework because it is the only framework available to the Israelites.

What this means, though, is that evangelical understandings of the doctrine of Scripture need to take account of the mythic elements, part of the human elements, of Scripture. And, as Enns says, “the doctrinal implications of the Bible being so much a part of its ancient contexts are still

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<sup>53</sup> See his post “An Incarnational Model” on The Biologos Form, November 13, 2009, available online at: <http://biologos.org/blog/an-incarnational-model>.

<sup>54</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 54.

not being addressed as much as they should.”<sup>55</sup>

The next section of this chapter examines what such doctrinal implications might look like for an evangelical understanding of Scripture along the lines proposed by Enns. Of particular concern will be an analysis of the method of evangelical traditioning recommended by Enns and the place of the doctrine of inerrancy within his incarnational model of Scripture.

## **§2.4. Challenging Inerrancy in Evangelical Traditioning**

I&I was seen by a few prominent evangelical scholars as a basic departure from any semblance of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. A number of evangelicals were particularly critical of Enns’ call for a reexamination of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture in light of Scripture’s ANE context.<sup>56</sup> So much so that a website was created to discuss the text and respond to some of the most frequent criticisms of I&I.<sup>57</sup> One of the most frequent criticism of I&I is that it denies biblical inerrancy. In response to this criticism—the only criticism that actually has two separate links on his site—Enns issued a series of statements about what he believes concerning the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

At the outset, Enns states that he does, in fact, believe in a kind of biblical inerrancy. He writes, “I affirm that I am committed to the Bible’s inerrancy as a function of its divine origin.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 47 (author’s emphasis).

<sup>56</sup> In addition to reviews of I&I by G.K. Beale, D.A. Carson and the Westminster Theological Seminary’s Historical and Theological Field Committee, all of whom will be discussed in detail in my next chapter, see particularly James W. Scott, “The Inspiration And Interpretation Of God’s Word, With Special Reference To Peter Enns. Part 1: Inspiration and Its Implications.” *WTJ* 71:1 (2009): 129-183.

<sup>57</sup> <http://iandibook.com/>

<sup>58</sup> <http://iandibook.com/responding-to-the-critics/ii-and-inerrancy-2/>

He also goes on to define what he means by biblical inerrancy: “If I may offer a thumbnail definition, *the Bible as it is is without error because the Bible as it is is God’s Word.*”<sup>59</sup> This affirmation, however, does not mean that Enns is a steadfast devotee of the Chicago Statement. As he says, “what is exceedingly important for me is the recognition that a faith-commitment to God as non-erring does not in and of itself lead naturally and quickly to unassailable explanations of the character of Scripture that this non-erring God produced through human agency.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Enns’ faith-commitment to a non-erring God is not something that predisposes him “to affirm *in what way* Scripture is without error.”<sup>61</sup> Statements replete with technical sophistication and voluminous levels of nuance are not at all what Enns has in mind when he avows biblical inerrancy, and this does set him rather firmly apart from the inerrantists discussed in the previous chapter who subscribe to the Chicago Statement.

Furthermore, it is Enns’ insistence that the content of the Old Testament is best understood through its ANE categories and not via theological declarations that puts his doctrine of Scripture squarely at odds with traditional inerrantists.<sup>62</sup> This is a rather important point and one that suggests a possible division between systematic theologians and those in biblical studies over the question of inerrancy. As Enns states,

What I am contending against is a definition of “truth” that has trouble conforming to the actual behavior of Scripture, preferring to impose “higher principles” that one supposedly

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. (my emphasis)

<sup>60</sup> <http://iandibook.com/responding-to-the-critics/criticism-3-ii-denies-inerrancy/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://iandibook.com/responding-to-the-critics/ii-and-inerrancy-2/>

<sup>62</sup> <http://iandibook.com/responding-to-the-critics/criticism-3-ii-denies-inerrancy/>; see also I&I, 67.



has access to apart from Scripture. As I see it, this is the classic battle, engaged over the last several generations, between some brands of Systematic Theology/Dogmatics and Biblical Studies. The former will insist that Scripture's behavior (the phenomena of Scripture, e.g., the NT's use of the OT) must be interpreted in light of supposed foundational affirmations, such as 2 Tim 3:16. *Biblical scholars respond that these "foundational affirmations" are actually other phenomena that need to be interpreted in context rather than to be elevated to a higher status, free from hermeneutical engagement.*<sup>63</sup>

This last sentence is of paramount importance for Enns' project. In short, Enns detects a fission between, on the one hand, certain types of apologetics which seek to conform what Scripture is and how it must behave to a foundational, non-contextualized doctrine, and, on the other hand, biblical scholars who question the propriety of this non-contextualized doctrine. For Enns, what is of paramount concern for the expression of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture is "what we have come to understand about the ancient contexts in which Scripture was written."<sup>64</sup> However, for inerrantists, their theological affirmations derived from 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21 (alongside their traditional interpretations) serve as their foundation for a doctrine of Scripture. The question Enns is asking here, then, is whether formulaic theological precepts are to drive our understanding of the significance and meaning of Scripture, or whether our expanding understanding of Scripture is to guide the significance (and possible adjustment) of our theological precepts. Answering this question leads to different understanding of the content and function of traditioning within evangelicalism.

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<sup>63</sup> <http://iandibook.com/responding-to-the-critics/criticism-3-ii-denies-inerrancy/> (my emphasis).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Evangelical traditioning following an Ennsian incarnational model consists of three basic orienting principles: conversation, humility, and patience. Firstly, the evangelical doctrine of Scripture needs to be in conversation with the biblical data. This means meaningful engagement with the ANE context of Scripture.<sup>65</sup> This also means that our understanding of Scripture has to come up from Scripture, and not down from our doctrinal commitments about Scripture. I am not implying that Enns is claiming that evangelical traditioning can have no “tradition” about Scripture from which to draw from. Clearly, the divine inspiration of Scripture is foremost and an absolutely necessary component of an incarnational model of Scripture. However, in an incarnational model, the human element of Scripture is just as significant as the divine element. Therefore, unassailable theological precepts about the definitive character of Scripture based on its divine inspiration (like that of the Chicago Statement) could not be incorporated into an incarnational approach to traditioning because they simply are not in conversation with the biblical data.

Secondly, and related to the first component, engagement with the biblical data “should lead us to a more willing recognition that the expression of our confession of the Bible as God’s word has a provisional quality to it.”<sup>66</sup> We are not to infer from this passage that Enns doubts the truthfulness of the assertion that the Bible is God’s word. Such an admission would be contrary to Enns’ own incarnational model of Scripture. Instead, the provisional dimension associated with saying that the Bible is God’s word has to do with our *conception of what it means* to say that the Bible is God’s word; it is *not* a declaration that the Bible *could be something other than* God’s word.

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<sup>65</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 168.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Ultimately, Enns is asking evangelicals to temper their intellectual certainty about how the Bible must behave. He cautions us to avoid asserting that we know once and for all exactly how the Bible can and cannot speak, and we know this *independently* from how the Bible actually does and does not speak because of our knowledge of who God is and how it must be that God behaves. Enns states, “the incarnate written word (Scripture) is, like Christ, beyond our ability to grasp exhaustively: we can speak of the incarnate Christ meaningfully, but never fully.”<sup>67</sup> In an incarnational model of evangelical traditioning, what is called for, then, is a kind of humility that acknowledges our fallen and, yes, even errant understanding of the incarnate word.

The final component of an incarnational approach to traditioning is patience “to know that no person or tradition is beyond correction.”<sup>68</sup> This is not meant to imply that we should suspend all our theological beliefs like some kind of Cartesian exercise; rather, it encourages us to combine the prior components of conversation and humility with an approach that sees the evangelical tradition as more dynamic than it is static, more malleable than it is rigid. Again, this does not bespeak a type of relativism about tradition where every doctrine is tentative. As Enns argues, “By faith, the church confesses that the Bible *is* God’s word. It is up to Christians of each generation, however, to work out what that means and what words work best to describe it.”<sup>69</sup> The fundamental task, therefore, in an Ennsian incarnational model of traditioning is to develop a vocabulary that best captures an evangelical doctrine of Scripture that while fully ingrained in the belief of the truth of God’s incarnate word, (i) sees this truth as informed through a discussion of the ANE context of Scripture; (ii) humbly allows God’s incarnate word to speak in

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<sup>67</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 168.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 (author’s emphasis).

the manner in which God has given His word to us; and (iii) tolerantly admits that our fallen and errant attempts at formulating a doctrine of God's incarnate word should always be open to revision.

It is important to conclude this section by asking a couple of questions about some of the concrete specifics of an Ennsian model of traditioning. Firstly, the ANE context of Scripture is not the only sociohistorical context that one must consider when discussing the historicity of the biblical text. Certainly, the sociohistorical context of first century Palestine was just as influential on the writers of the New Testament as the ANE context was on the writers of the Old Testament. And while the focus of I&I is on the Old Testament, one needs to ask what an Ennsian sociohistorical approach to traditioning would look like when applied to, say, the way Jesus is presented in the gospels of Mark and John.

And secondly, while it is difficult to decry a humble, open-minded approach to the Bible, such an approach does present certain challenges to sectarian education. After all, evangelical traditioning is as much about identity formation as it is about theological education. It is one thing to insist upon a shift in biblical pedagogy away from the inerrantist project, however, such a shift takes on an entirely new significance when it directly confronts long-standing individual and institutional identities predicated on a particular doctrine of Scripture.

## **§2.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, my primary focus was to explore the central arguments presented in Peter Enns' controversy *Inspiration and Incarnation* in order to demonstrate how they offer a conception of evangelical traditioning that directly challenges the doctrine of inerrancy. Enns' incarnational model of Scripture requires evangelicals to integrate the cultural embeddedness of

the human element of God's incarnate word into their doctrine of Scripture. This means, though, that genre categories like myth are well-suited literary devices for transmitting God's word and that evangelicals need to get comfortable with such categories because, as Enns says, "this is the Bible we have."<sup>70</sup> Due to the ANE contextualization of the human element of Scripture, Enns formulates a conception of evangelical traditioning based on three areas: (i) a conversation between ANE literary sources and the biblical account that contributes to the defining of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture; (ii) a humble disposition when approaching our expectations of what God's incarnate word is to look like and how it is to behave; and (iii) a patience understanding that all traditions—including our own—are not impervious to correction and adjustment. As I argued in this chapter, an Ennsian model of traditioning is not only at odds with the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy but it also presents a challenge to the practice of traditioning undertaken by evangelical institutions committed to the defense of the doctrine of inerrancy. How specific evangelical scholars and a prominent evangelical seminary responded to the Ennsian model is the subject of my next chapter.

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<sup>70</sup> Enns' interview on WHYY-FM on 9/13/2008. The interview can be found online at: [http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns\\_radio\\_times\\_interview.mp3](http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns_radio_times_interview.mp3).

## CHAPTER THREE: DEFENDING INERRANCY IN EVANGELICAL TRADITIONING: RESPONDING TO ENNS' BIBLIOLOGY

### §3.1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to give an account of the so-called Peter Enns controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) from 2006-2008. I begin by historically framing the controversy with brief synopsis of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s and the establishment of Westminster Theological Seminary. Secondly, I very concisely examine the *institutional* response to I&I by WTS faculty in the form of the Historical and Theological Field Committee (HTFC) report and the response back to the HTFC in the form of the Hermeneutics Field Committee (HFC) report. Thirdly, I succinctly examine two *individual* responses to I&I in the form of reviews of I&I by D.A. Carson and Gregory K. Beale. Finally, I conclude by probing Articles XII and XIX of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in order to demonstrate the twin goal of inerrantist evangelical traditioning of insulation and defending “orthodoxy.”

### §3.2. Framing the Peter Enns Controversy: Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and the establishment of WTS

The rejection of Enns' I&I by conservative evangelicals was not something altogether unforeseen. In fact, even Enns himself says that when he reflects back on the so-called controversy over I&I that “there [was] some surprise but no shock.”<sup>1</sup> Why might that be? The most likely possibility has to do with the history of Enns' academic

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<sup>1</sup> See Enns' Radio Times interview with Marty Moss-Coane on 9/13/2008, available online at: [http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns\\_radio\\_times\\_interview.mp3](http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/enns_radio_times_interview.mp3).

institution at the time of the controversy, Westminster Theological Seminary.

Located just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, WTS was founded in 1929 during the high-water mark of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s and 1930s. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy consisted of a series of intra-denominational disputes within Protestantism over the question of what it means to be an orthodox Christian. (i.e. what is it that serves as the basis, the *fundamentals*, of the Christian faith?) For religious conservatives at the end of the 1920s, there was a feeling of cultural dissolution and rising secularism.

As Bradley J. Longfield notes, “To many conservative Christians, one reason for the dissolution of American culture was all too apparent. For the past thirty years liberal ministers, relying on German historical criticism and Darwinian thought had been, in the words of Clarence Macartney, ‘slowly secularizing the church.’”<sup>2</sup> While this controversy affected a number of denominations and their educational institutions, none experienced the full force of the controversy quite like the Northern Presbyterian Church in general and Princeton Theological Seminary in particular.<sup>3</sup> As George Marsden states, “In 1910 the Presbyterian General Assembly...adopted a five-point declaration of ‘essential’ doctrines. Summarized, these points were: (1) inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of the miracles.” During the next decade these five points would be referred

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<sup>2</sup> Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29-30. See also James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012. ).

to as “the five points of fundamentalism.”<sup>4</sup> Controversy erupted within Presbyterian denominations when on May 22, 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick gave a sermon from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in New York City entitled, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” Fosdick argued in his sermon that belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, and the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement were not the bedrock beliefs of Christianity, and that tolerance for individuals who have differing beliefs on the aforementioned doctrinal matters was needed.

The conservative critique of Fosdick was swift and vociferous and in 1923 Princeton Theological Seminary faculty member J. Gersham Machen (1881-1937) published his response to the dangers posed by Fosdick and the modernists in his work *Christianity and Liberalism*.<sup>5</sup> As historian James H. Moorhead explains, Machen’s work unequivocally stated that the “Christian churches faced a major challenge from ‘the modern lust of scientific conquest’—that is, the desire to subject all spheres of life to the presumptions of naturalistic scientific method.” For Machen, Christianity was principally at war with liberalism and, as Machen stated, “In the intellectual battle of the present day, there can be no ‘peace without victory’: one side or the other must win.”<sup>6</sup>

The objective of the conservative battle plan was to maintain a denomination’s doctrinal purity as articulated by the five points of fundamentalism. As Moorhead notes, the “conservatives’ ultimate goal was to force modernists to withdraw from the

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<sup>4</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 117.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term conservative rather than fundamentalist as my shorthand for the ultraconservative Presbyterians associated with Machen and other responsible for the founding of WTS as a term of compromise for those who would balk at the notion that Machen *et al* are to be properly classified as fundamentalists per se.

<sup>6</sup> Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 356-357.



denominations or to be ousted. In the Presbyterian controversy, the denominational battle was intimately tied to a struggle within Princeton Seminary itself.”<sup>7</sup>

A pivotal moment in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy for Princeton Theological Seminary was in 1924 when the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church unanimously passed a motion to form a special commission tasked with investigating the present “causes making for unrest” within the church. As Moorhead notes, approved in 1926 and again in 1927, the commission’s report effectively stated that, “without explicitly saying so...the [1919] Assembly had exceeded its power when it tried to erect the five points [of fundamentalism] into ‘essential and necessary’ articles.” In addition, and, again, without mentioning Machen by name, the report also stated that notion of a widespread exodus from the denomination over what conservatives decried as a waning of orthodoxy was highly unlikely.<sup>8</sup>

The commission’s findings deeply divided the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, and then in 1929 the General Assembly sought to reorganize the seminary, merging together its Board of Directors with its Board of Trustees to have just a single Board of Trustees. As W. Robert Godfrey argues, the move to merge the Board of Trustees, which oversaw financial concerns for the seminary, with the Board of Directors, which oversaw educational matters, was seen by conservatives as a way to wrest control of Princeton away from its conservative, fundamentalist voices. While opposed by the Board of Directors, the President of the seminary, J. Ross Stevenson, supported this move and it is important to note that Stevenson had had an inclusive vision of the church and wanted to make Princeton representative of all theological positions,

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<sup>7</sup> Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 343.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 365.

liberal and conservative. Stevenson thought that a unified Board would be more inclined to grant his vision. Disgusted by what he thought was the General Assembly's move away from Princeton's orthodox moorings, Machen and two other Princeton faculty members left Princeton and founded their own seminary—WTS—in 1929.<sup>9</sup>

A brilliant academic who was also exceedingly confrontational, if not belligerent, in his dealings with others who disagreed with him, Machen's vision for WTS was built upon two tenets. As W. Stanford Reid notes, Machen stressed "one...the final authority of the Bible, which he characterized as 'a plain book addressed to plain men, and ...it means exactly what it says.'" And secondly, "since Princeton was now 'lost to the evangelical cause,' [WTS] would stand firmly for the Reformed theological position as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF]."<sup>10</sup> WTS's commitments to the authority of Scripture and the WCF were anything but anti-intellectual, though. As D. G. Hart writes, "Rather than founding a Bible institute that reduced educational requirements in order to hasten evangelistic activity...Machen established a seminary that required a liberal education, followed the traditional theological curriculum, and was designed to prepare Presbyterian ministers for routine parish work."<sup>11</sup> In fact, the "Constitution of Westminster Theological Seminary," adopted in 1930, illustrates WTS's "respect to scholarship and militant defense of the Reformed Faith."<sup>12</sup> This simultaneous

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to Machen (NT), Robert Dick Wilson (OT), and Oswald Allis (Semitic philology) left Princeton Theological Seminary to found WTS. See W. Robert Godfrey, "The Westminster School" in David F. Wells, ed. *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 90-92. See also, Morehead, *Princeton Seminary*, 364-368.

<sup>10</sup> See W. Stanford Reid, "J. Gresham Machen" in Wells, *Reformed Theology*, 104.

<sup>11</sup> D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2003), 134.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Yeo, *Plundering the Egyptians*, n3, 5.

commitment to scholarship and combative defense of the faith has been a hallmark of WTS since its formation that continues on to the present day.

I argue that this brief synopsis of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and creation of WTS helps foreground both the institutional culture surrounding the so-called Peter Enns controversy at WTS *and* its reverberations throughout evangelical theology. Conceived in a moment of denominational crisis, enveloped within a larger religious-cultural crisis, WTS was, at its birth, forced to forge a battle-like institutional mentality, a mentality similarly constructed by the inerrantists responsible for the ICBI and the Chicago Statement. This mentality necessitates an approach to evangelical traditioning fundamentally at odds with the one developed through Enns' incarnational model of Scripture. In order to support this assertion, I will now look at the documents surrounding the Peter Enns controversy itself, but first I need to provide the context for the documents.

The documents discussed in the first section below were the result of formal faculty discussions about the fundamental identity of WTS begun in the fall of 2004.<sup>13</sup> Starting in the fall 2006, questions and criticism were being raised both by faculty members and others of I&I, and a decision was reached to have a faculty discussion of the text. On February 4, 2006 a meeting took place and the Historical and Theological Field Committee (HTFC)<sup>14</sup> presented orally a list of five objections it had with I&I. President

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<sup>13</sup> See "Précis to the Board on Theological Tensions on the Faculty," 33.

<sup>14</sup> At WTS, faculty are placed on one of three committees based on the seminary's three doctoral programs. The Practical Theology Field Committee is comprised of the Practical Theology department; the Hermeneutics Field Committee is comprised of the Biblical Studies departments; and the Historical and Theological Field Committee is comprised of the Church History, Systematic Theology, and Apologetics departments.

Peter Lillback then requested that these objections be put in writing and on April 4, 2006, the HTFC presented a 24-page document based on their five objections initially voiced in February. President Lillback then instructed the Hermeneutics Field Committee (HFC), who generally supported Enns, to respond to this document in writing, which it did in the spring 2007.<sup>15</sup>

### **§3.3. The Peter Enns Controversy**

#### **§3.3.1. Reviewing I&I Internally at WTS: Historical and Theological Field Committee (HTFC) and Hermeneutics Field Committee (HFC) Reports**

In an open letter to Peter Enns dated December 2006, the HTFC at WTS revealed its deepest problem with *I&I*: “Both in what it says and by what it does not say *I&I* is misleading at best. In particular, in terms of the incarnational analogy, said to be controlling in the book’s approach, Scripture’s divinity, its divine side or character, is virtually absent and certainly nonfunctional.”<sup>16</sup> This letter, functioning as the précis to the HTFC’s report, goes on to state “what is requisite, but lacking, [in *I&I*] is a forthright affirmation, however brief, of what the divinity of Scripture *is* and, no less importantly, how it controls your focus on its humanity.”<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note here that references to the Bible as God’s word or to the divine author are inadequate for the committee because of their “vagueness.” The letter goes on

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<sup>15</sup> The documents surrounding the Enns controversy at WTS have been made available to “interested parties” on WTS’s website in a single pdf file available at: <http://files.wts.edu/uploads/images/files/Official%20Theological%20Documents%20for%20Web.pdf>. I will refer to the pagination of this 163-page pdf file in my citation of these documents. See “Précis to the Board on Theological Tensions on the Faculty,” 34-35.

<sup>16</sup> HTFC, 4. The members of the HTFC who issued this letter were as follows: William Edgar (Apologetics); Richard B. Gaffin (Systematics, Emeritus); Jeffrey Jue (Church History); K. Scott Oliphint (Apologetics and Systematics); and Lane Tipton (Systematics). The actual report itself includes the addition of Carl R. Trueman (Church History and Vice President for academic affairs). (“Précis to the Board on Theological Tensions on the Faculty,” n1, 33).

<sup>17</sup> HTFC, 4 (my emphasis).

to state “Particularly within the context of the academic study of the Bible in which we find ourselves, that fidelity demands, for the sake of clarity, that we affirm, however briefly, the divine authorship and *consequent divine authority of Scripture* as articulated, for one, in the Westminster Confession, chapter 1.” Enns is then chastised for arguing in private to some of the committee members that such a declaration would have “lost his audience” of individuals whose faith has been unsettled due to “intellectually dishonest” or “evasive” answers to difficulties in the Bible in the past.<sup>18</sup> What is argued by the committee is that such individuals are most of all in need of the kind of avowal of the divine authorship and authority of Scripture as highlighted in WCF 1. The kind of pronouncement they suggest Enns’ target audience is in need of would assure them of

at least three things *in advance of* whatever problems we encounter in the Bible. Because “God (who is truth itself) [is] the author thereof” (WCF, 1:4): 1) the Bible is reliable and, appropriate to the genre involved, will not mislead us in what it reports as having transpired; 2) the Bible does not contradict itself, and what it teaches as a whole, in all its parts, is unified and harmonious in a doctrinal or didactic sense; 3) problems that may remain insoluble for us are not ultimately unsolvable; they have their resolution with God.<sup>19</sup>

Near the end of the open letter, the committee gives what it considers to be its summation of I&I. It writes,

In sum, we would characterize *Inspiration and Incarnation* as a very unhelpful first step away from the biblical doctrine of inspiration, and we think that Enns’

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<sup>18</sup> HTFC, 5. Whether or not such conversations actually took place or were understood correctly is impossible to know.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (author’s emphasis).

principles, if carried through more fully and consistently, will lead to his eventual abandonment of that doctrine. In the end, we fear, as time passes his "incarnational" model will have less and less place for notions of God's authorship of scripture and eventually no place at all for these notions, at least as taught in Scripture. Enns needs to show us positively, from Scripture, why this fear is groundless and will not prove to be true.<sup>20</sup>

While not explicitly mentioned by name, it is reasonable to infer from the aforementioned statement that the HTFC is concluding that the arguments in I&I will ultimately lead one away from the doctrine of inerrancy, and two key objections to I&I are immediately evident from the open letter. Firstly, Enns has failed to adequately account for the divine nature of the divine-human production of Scripture, and, secondly, the path of his incarnational model of Scripture will (inevitably?) lead to the abandoning of Scripture's self-attestation of its divine nature. In order to see how such conclusions were reached by the HTFC, I will now look at the HTFC's response to I&I, interrogate this response in light of the HFC's report, keeping in mind the two objections I just outlined.

On February 26, 2006 the HTFC met to discuss what it considered to be the five fundamental concerns with I&I. These concerns are

- 1) a doctrine of Scripture that diverges from the classic Reformation doctrine, in particular the tradition of Old Princeton and Westminster and specifically, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), chapter 1;
- 2) a reductionistic Incarnational model;

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<sup>20</sup> HTFC, 7.

- 3) a Post-Conservative Evangelical (PCE) approach to the discipline of theology;
- 4) a lack of clarity;
- 5) the appearance of speaking for the entire faculty.<sup>21</sup>

For my discussion, the first of these concerns is the most relevant and so we need not focus on all of the HTFC responses to *I&I*.<sup>22</sup> My goal here is a concise, but careful, summary of only a few of the major arguments presented by the HTFC report on the relationship between the divine-human elements of Scripture. The general concern in 1) comes from the fact that *I&I* is principally focused on question of the doctrine of Scripture. As Enns writes, “The purpose of this book is to bring an evangelical doctrine of Scripture into conversation with the implications generated by some important themes in modern biblical scholarship-particularly Old Testament scholarship-over the past 150 years.”<sup>23</sup>

As the HTFC rightly points out, Enns is principally concerned with the question of the doctrine of Scripture in *I&I*, and he is concerned with the lack of integration between important conclusions reached in biblical studies over the last century and a half and an understanding of what these discoveries mean for the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. I suppose there is a sense in which, at a basic level, Enns is at odds with classical, or rather, traditional evangelical approaches to the doctrine of Scripture because instead of simply reproducing them he wants them reevaluated in light of new evidence. However, for the HTFC, these traditional approaches are of tremendous importance because they chiefly

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> I recognize the close connection between points 1 and 2 above, but for the sake of my argument here I want to solely focus on the first point.

<sup>23</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 13.

concern the divine (or inspired) nature of Scripture. Accordingly, “it seems to the HTFC that I&I effectively denies, in that it does not presuppose in its argumentation, that Scripture is *foundationally* and *essentially* divine.”<sup>24</sup> Logical problems with this statement aside,<sup>25</sup> what is at issue here is that Enns’ notion of viewing the Bible in its ancient context violates the foundational evangelical (Reformed) notion of God being the solitary author of Scripture as is expressed in WCF 1:4: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof...” As the HTFC says, “This notion of divine authorship is in keeping with the Scripture’s notion of itself, i.e., that it is *theopneustos* (‘God-breathed,’ 2 Tim 3:16).”<sup>26</sup>

For the HTFC, the problem with Enns’ insistence on recognizing the cultural embeddedness of Scripture is that such a concession ultimately denies the divine nature of Scripture which is self-attested to in the text of Scripture itself. As the HTFC states, Enns’ methodology “incorporates cultural phenomena in order to determine what Scripture essentially *is* rather than affirming Scripture as the sole norm for the framing of a doctrine of Scripture...To move, even slightly, beyond Scripture in order to re-formulate a doctrine of Scripture is to take away from Scripture’s authority.”<sup>27</sup> The concern that the HTFC has here is mainly this: Scripture and Scripture alone defines what Scripture is. Presumably, this means that even contextualizing Scripture in its sociohistorical context is moving away from Scripture’s self-attestation of what it essential is.

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<sup>24</sup> HTFC, 12.

<sup>25</sup> How does the lack of a presupposition necessitate a denial? If I fail to presuppose that I will have turkey for lunch does that necessarily mean I deny I will have turkey for lunch?

<sup>26</sup> HTFC., 13.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14-15.



The above concern fails to fully capture the substance of Enns' position, however. Firstly, Enns is not suggesting that anyone other than God is ultimately the author of Scripture. Rather, what he is saying is that understanding the human element of the divine-human production of Scripture is essential to our very understanding of what it is that the author (i.e. God) is actually *saying through* the human authors. And secondly, instead of moving away from Scripture to reformulate a doctrine of Scripture, as is being claimed, Enns is, in fact, moving deeper into Scripture to delve into *its own* categories, on *its own* terms. For example, in response to this claim made by the HTFC, the Hermeneutics Field Committee (HFC) stated that,

*it is precisely our profound conviction that the Bible and it alone is the word of God that drives our concern to understand it on its own terms.* The Bible is the real and ultimate authority, and it must determine what *its* statements about *itself* mean, not some notion of what the Bible 'must' say or do since it's divine...Such close attention to the human contexts does not entail a de-divinization of Scripture, or imply that God does not directly intervene in human events. Nor does it imply that human authors cannot be given supernatural knowledge by supernatural means. It rather recognizes that, however knowledge from God is conveyed, it comes to and through a human author in thought forms he can understand, and according to frameworks of knowledge that are available to him in his historical context.<sup>28</sup>

In short, what Enns and the HFC—of which Enns was a member—are contesting is the notion that emphasis on the human element of Scripture somehow diminishes the divinity

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<sup>28</sup> HFC, 46 (my emphasis).

of God's incarnate word. On the contrary, such a study better affords one the set of hermeneutical tools (e.g. ANE literary categories and genre expectations) necessary for interpreting the word of God as expressed *through* an ancient context.

The final point that needs to be made about the engagement with the HTFC report is that, as the HFC states, "*Scripture* is the supreme judge, *not* our doctrinal formulations."<sup>29</sup>

While it is true that Enns did not grant prior doctrinal formulations—like the doctrine of inerrancy—*sole access in determining* how the Scriptural 'data' is to be understood, this is nothing to be chastised for; in fact, if anything, it appears to be better in keeping with WCF than some of the suggestions offered by the HTFC.<sup>30</sup> By way of example, consider the following section from the HTFC report. This section first quotes Enns and then offers a series of questions meant to demonstrate the lack of clarity and possible heterodox nature of some of Enns' claims. Quoting Enns, the HTFC writes,

All attempts to articulate the nature of Scripture are open to examination... I firmly believe...that the Spirit of God is fully engaged in such a theological process and at the same time that our attempts to articulate what God's word is have a necessarily provisional dimension. To put it succinctly: the Spirit leads the church into truth -- he does not simply drop us down in the middle of it.<sup>31</sup>

Then the HTFC offers its comment on the passage by stating, "Such a bold and unqualified statement seems to open up a host of theological problems. That Scripture is

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<sup>29</sup> HFC, 78. (author's emphasis) This is a direct reference to WCF 1:10 which states "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

<sup>30</sup> See WCF 1:10; 1:5; 1:1 and 1:8, for example.

<sup>31</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 48-49 (author's emphasis).

divine - is that open to examination? That Scripture is authoritative - is that also open to examination?”<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to see how Enns’ explicit affirmation of the divine nature of Scripture does not unequivocally silence this objection, but what is most concerning is what Enns says directly after this passage. He writes, “To say this is not a low view of Scripture or of the role of the Holy Spirit. It is simply to recognize what has been the case throughout the history of the church, that diverse views and changes of opinion over time have been the constant companions of the church and that God has not brought this process to a closure.”<sup>33</sup>

Enns’ concern for humility in one’s articulation of what God’s word is would seem to present a different reading of Enns’ position than the one provided by the HTFC. One may wonder then why this is such an apparent discrepancy between Enns’ position and the presentation of his position by the HTFC. In fact, one might even raise the possibility that Enns is being deliberately caricatured. For example, the very next sentence in the HTFC report asserts, “This is a common theological claim consistently advanced by PCEs [postconservative evangelicals].”<sup>34</sup> What is important to note here is that that “PCE” is a loaded, pejorative term for inerrantists. So even if one were to argue that the HTFC has properly classified Enns as a PCE, its usage of PCE in describing Enns serves two functions in that it both categorizes Enns’ view while simultaneously discrediting his position at the outset. By way of analogy one can think of how the labels of liberal or the Tea Party are used in various political contexts to conjure up feelings of animosity or

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<sup>32</sup> HTFC, 29,

<sup>33</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> See Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

distrust toward a position *before* said position is even fully articulated.

Defenders of the HTFC might response to my claim, however, by stating that I am drawing inferences about the HTFC's terminology that were never intended to be drawn. However, in the preface of the HFC report, an admission is made to the HTFC's incorrect attribution of "the living Christ" to I&I, something the HFC rightfully pointed out when it stated "the HTFC Response has done more than find a Barthian tendency in I&I; it has rewritten I&I in order to impose upon it a Barthian doctrine of Scripture, which it simply does not have."<sup>35</sup> One has to wonder, then, if the HTFC's deliberate Barthian caricature of Enns' view is part of a wider strategy employed by certain faculty at WTS in order to buttress a "militant defense of the Reformed Faith."

After reviewing the materials provided by the HTFC and the HFC, a motion was drafted to declare Enns' work and teaching within the bounds of the WCF and the faculty at WTS approved the motion 12-8 on December 6, 2007. However, President Lillback, who is also a professor of church history at the seminary, referred the matter to the Board of Trustees. On March 26, 2008 the board voted 18-9 to suspend Enns at the end of school year.<sup>36</sup> Enns and the seminary reached an agreement on July 23, 2008 that Enns would leave the seminary effective August 1, 2008 after fourteen years of service.<sup>37</sup>

The HTFC report concludes its discussion of the contents of I&I by stating that, "we are reluctantly brought to the conclusion that I&I is committed in principle to moving

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<sup>35</sup> HFC, 110.

<sup>36</sup> For a message from the Board of Trustees at WTS about this vote, see <http://www.wts.edu/stayinformed/view.html?id=104>

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.wts.edu/stayinformed/view.html?id=187>.

beyond the biblical and Reformed view of Scripture expressed in that chapter.”<sup>38</sup> What is important about the underlined portion of this statement is the presumption that there is a singular articulation of “the biblical and Reformed view of Scripture” and that this articulation is neither up for debate nor open to reinterpretation.<sup>39</sup> If Enns was somehow suggesting that the Bible was anything other than the word of God then I could see how such a conclusion would be warranted. However, that is not at all what he is trying to accomplish in I&I. Rather, he was calling into question the *a priori* entailments evangelicals attach to the notion of the Bible as the word of God (i.e. word of God by definition cannot be mythic, must be wholly unique from its ancient context, etc.) It is with respect to these entailments that Enns is calling for a shift away from, arguing that it is evangelical expectations of what the Bible as the word of God *should* look like that are in need of adjustment.

What is most telling about the HTFC’s conclusion may not be the statement itself, however, but rather the footnote attached to the conclusion. The footnote reads, “As already indicated, Old Princeton and Westminster are centrally significant in the conservative defense of the Bible in the Modernist/Fundamentalist controversy.”<sup>40</sup> It is difficult not to read this reference back to the crisis point in which the seminary was born, coupled with the language of catastrophe that impregnates the report, as a clarion call to

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<sup>38</sup> HTFC, 31-32. My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Embedded in this notion is also the idea of a harmony between a biblical view of Scripture and the Reformed view. Given the problem of defining just what a biblical view of Scripture might be or how such a notion would have made any sense to the biblical authors themselves, one should reserve judgment about the accuracy of conflating the biblical view of Scripture with that of the Reformed view of Scripture however the Reformed view of Scripture is defined. For a classic discussion of the components of the Reformed view of Scripture, see J.F. Peter, “The Reformed View of the Scriptures,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 31.4 (1959): 196-204.

<sup>40</sup> HTFC, 32.

all defenders of the Bible that, once again, the wolf of heterodoxy is at the door and he is dressed in alluring Ennsian garb.

The so-called Peter Enns controversy was not restricted to what was happening at WTS, though. In fact, while the HTFC report began an internal debate at WTS about I&I, elsewhere two very prominent evangelical scholars, D.A. Carson and Gregory K. Beale, published in-depth, critical reviews of Enns' I&I. Examining these reviews, both of which are cited by name in the HTFC's open letter to Enns, will help to not only broaden the parameters of the "controversy" surrounding I&I, but it will also illustrate the defensive and combative mentality commonplace to inerrantists. While both reviews are substantive, I only want to briefly engage with one particular point in Carson's review, making Beale's review the primary focus of the following section. I proceed in this way because Beale's review is much more integral to the Peter Enns controversy than is Carson's review.

### §3.3.2. Reviewing I&I: D.A. Carson

A signatory of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, D.A. Carson is one of the founders of the Gospel Coalition<sup>41</sup> and research professor in New Testament at Trinity International University. Widely considered one of the most prominent figures in evangelical theology, in April 2006, Carson wrote the article "Three Books on the Bible:

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<sup>41</sup> Started in 2004, the Gospel Coalition is a group of evangelical leaders who see "evangelicalism as adrift" and in a state of "identity crisis." It seeks to put the proper understanding of the Gospel at the center of the Christian life. It terms of its confessional statement with regard to the Scriptures—co-authored by Carson—the Coalition believes, "that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the *verbally inspired Word of God*, which is utterly authoritative and *without error in the original writings*, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks." (my emphasis)

A Critical Review” for reformation21.org, the online magazine of the Alliance for Confessing Evangelicals.<sup>42</sup> In this article, Carson critically considered works by John Webster, Peter Enns, and N.T. Wright.<sup>43</sup> His rather in-depth reviews feature a lengthy overview of each work followed by a number of objections he poses for each. While Carson directly addresses all three of Enns’ substantive inquiries in I&I (the uniqueness of the OT in an ANE context, the theological diversity of the OT, and the NT’s use of the OT), for my purposes here it is only salient that we deal with Carson’s objections concerning Enns’ understanding of the uniqueness of the OT within an ANE context.

Before advancing to Carson’s critique of Enns’ notion of the embeddedness of the OT within an ANE context, it is important to take note of his general critique of whom Enns considers to be his audience in I&I. Carson contends that while Enns says that his writing is aimed at addressing those dissatisfied with standard evangelical approaches to vexing problems present in the Scriptures, Carson believes Enns’ argument attempts to convince “the reader that the difficulties [he] isolates are real, and must be taken more seriously by evangelicals than is usually the case.” For Carson then, Enns’ real target in I&I does not seem to be theologically dissatisfied evangelicals, but rather, Enns is seeking to “disturb the comfortable,” calling on all evangelicals to recognize the serious problems he identifies and deal with them accordingly.<sup>44</sup>

While Carson might be partially correct here, I would argue that while Enns’ primary

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<sup>42</sup> This article is available at: <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/three-books-on-the-bible-a-critical-review.php>

<sup>43</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Enns’ I&I; and N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> See <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/three-books-on-the-bible-a-critical-review.php>

focus is on evangelicals dissatisfied with traditional responses to some of the challenges present in Scripture, that does not preclude him from simultaneously calling for all evangelicals to be vexed by the problems he discusses. After all, perhaps such an assertion serves the function of comforting those dissatisfied evangelicals, arguing that it is not their lack of “sincerity of faith” that is causing their problems with Scripture, but rather, such difficulties are actually there in Scripture and all need to address them.

It is possible that Carson’s concern here, like that of the HTFC, is simply a lack of precision on the part of Enns in detailing exactly who his audience is in I&I. At best, though, this is a superficial objection, and since it does not pertain to any of the actual substantive claims made by Enns, it is unclear to me why such an objection would be raised *at the very beginning* of a review. However, such an objection does make sense, I would argue, if one is presuming a defensive posture against the claims being made by Enns. The purpose of discussing Enns’ “hidden” audience would be to establish a sense of suspicion at the outset before any of Enns’ substantive claims are addressed, attempting to demonstrate that what may look innocuous is really something rather sinister. While I fully grant that my assertion here is speculative, as I will demonstrate with the next example, there are supporting elements in Carson’s review that point to just such an analysis.

Consider Carson’s first substantive objection regarding Enns’ understanding of the uniqueness of Scripture. His objection has to do with Enns’ use of the category “myth,” and because my argument depends on close scrutiny of the language used by Carson, I want to quote his entire objection verbatim. It reads,

*First, the "myth" category is not so much wrong as loaded. Enns’ definition, we*



recall, is that myth is "*an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who are we? Where do we come from?*" (40; the italics are his). By itself, of course, this definition is fairly innocuous, for it does not even glance at the question of how we should relate this "ancient, premodern, prescientific" way of thinking about origins with reality. Yet the history of the use of "myth" in the study of the Bible—not only with respect to origins, but also with respect to who Jesus is: one cannot easily forget the influence of David Friedrich Strauss—warns us that unless one asks a lot of pressing questions, "myth" becomes the proverbial nose of the camel in the tent. Are there not some slightly better ways of proceeding than a choice between "twenty-first century science" and "myth"?<sup>45</sup>

Carson's concern here appears to be that there is a good deal of unwarranted baggage associated with the use of "myth" when talking about the Bible, and he wonders if there is not a better term that we could employ in our discussions of the so-called "mythic" elements in Scripture. Again, this is a very odd criticism, especially when one considers it is the *first specific* criticism Carson mentions about this area of I&I.

Three observations need to be made about Carson's critique. Firstly, Carson does not offer what he would consider to be an acceptable alternative to "myth." Secondly, his main problem with Enns' definition of myth is that his definition "does not even glance at the question of how we should relate this [mythic] way of thinking about origins with reality." However, the problem with this objection is that Enns does address this issue on the same page in I&I that Carson quotes his definition of myth from, page 40. In Enns'

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<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/three-books-on-the-bible-a-critical-review.php>

explanation of myth he makes two points clear. Firstly, myths are not akin to scientific observations in any way, and secondly, they are stories manufactured by the ancients to answer questions about ultimate meaning (i.e. Where we came from? Who we are? How we relate to the ultimate?, etc.)<sup>46</sup>

In this way then the mythical elements of Genesis 1-11 do not answer the question of origins in terms of a scientific understanding of reality (e.g. astrophysics, cosmology, biology, etc.). In short, they are not science; rather, they represent ancient culture's attempt to answer profound questions through the only means available to the ancients: narratives about a creation brought about through power figures or gods. For Enns, then, it is not that the Israelites failed to record myths. Rather, it is that their myths, as Enns says, were *transformed* by God "to focus on [Israel's] God, the real one."<sup>47</sup> Carson may not like this response or understanding of myth, but it is incorrect to suggest that Enns does not address the relationship between myth and reality in any significant way in I&I.

And finally, Carson cautions us to be mindful of the way in which myth has been used in the study of the Bible in the past. Carson is quick to move well beyond the discussion of myth and origins (Enns' focus) to a reference myth and Jesus (which Enns never really discusses). He does this by mentioning David Friedrich Strauss. In 1835, Strauss published the wildly controversial *Life of Jesus*, which argued that a number of the stories about Jesus, like his birth, baptism, and feeding of the multitudes, were not historical in any meaningful sense of the word, but rather, were legendary and developed in a similar

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<sup>46</sup> See Enns, *I&I*, 40-41.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 54.

way as did other legends surrounding great men.<sup>48</sup> What is interesting about this particular reference is that while there has been a tremendous amount of work on the relationship between myth and the OT since Strauss' 1835 publication,<sup>49</sup> and while it is not clear from Enns' writing that he has Strauss in mind with respect to his use of myth, Carson only makes a reference to Strauss.<sup>50</sup> While it is impossible to relay the intentions of another author with perfect precision, we should still take pause here to ask why it might be that Carson gives this reference to Strauss. Could it be the fact that Strauss' findings represented a crisis point for many over the reliability of the Bible and perhaps what Carson sees here with Enns is the continuation of a Straussian assault on the reliability of the traditional evangelical understanding of what the Bible.

I argue that such a reading—a reading which views Enns' use of myth as a genesis of another crisis in confidence over the reliability of the Bible—gives us valuable insight into the way in which Carson not only sees the effects of Enns' use of myth in I&I, but also Enns' project as a whole, and that this reading helps explain why Carson structures his review of I&I in this way. Let me offer an example from elsewhere in Carson's review to help elucidate my point. Consider Carson's sole use of the phrase "traditional understanding of the nature of Scripture" in his review. In discussing the

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<sup>48</sup> See Oden, "Myth and Mythology," 946. See also David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*. Reprint. (Kingston, Ontario: Legacy Books Press, 2010). See also Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (trans. W. Montgomery: Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005).

<sup>49</sup> For example, Herman Gunkel and Brevard Childs are both cited by Enns in his Further Readings section of I&I (68). See B.S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*. Studies in Biblical Theology 27. (London: SCM, 1960) and Herman Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*. Translated by W.H. Carruth. (Chicago: Open Court, 1901).

<sup>50</sup> Strauss' fate over his work was certainly not a pleasant one. As Robert A. Oden notes, "The public indignation direct against Strauss led to his dismissal from his academic post at Tübingen, destroyed his academic career, and led him to withdraw from most of his life from the world of biblical scholarship." See Oden, "Myth in the OT," 957.

ANE authors and their understanding of the relationship between what they wrote and what actually happened, Carson writes the following:

And if [the ANE and biblical authors] *did* think that their accounts really did describe things, more or less, as they occurred, what, precisely, are we to infer? If they did *not* think of their accounts as describing, more or less, what occurred, what *did* they think? Or do we know too little to say? I can imagine half a dozen ways of proceeding from here, some of which would be seen as widely acceptable to *traditional understandings of the nature of Scripture*, and some of which would not be. What I cannot imagine is a responsible handling of the nexus of Scripture, myth, and history, *without* addressing some of these questions. (my emphasis)<sup>51</sup>

Even though it is unclear as to what exactly Carson means by “more or less” here, what is startling about this claim is that even a cursory glance at I&I should suggest to one that Enns does not think that either the biblical authors or other ANE authors reported exactly what happened in the way in which Carson appears to be describing it. In short, Carson appears to want a more extended and balanced treatment of what Enns has already done by claiming that he has not really engaged with the material in a meaningful fashion.

The problem here is that Enns is not really interested in such a discussion because, after all, if the author(s) of Genesis 1 thought he/they was/were describing what actually happened in terms of the material origins of the cosmos, then he/they would be horribly vague and simply incorrect by the standards of modern science. Clearly, for Enns, something else is going on in Genesis 1 and ANE literature than simply reporting what actually happened, as a number of people who have a “traditional understanding of the

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<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/three-books-on-the-bible-a-critical-review.php>

nature of Scripture” have pointed out as well.<sup>52</sup> It is hard to read Carson’s statement above, therefore, as anything other than an eschewing of Enns’ conclusions via the claim that Enns has not really addressed the material, and that Enns fails to acknowledge that it is quite possible to address this material in modes consistent with a “traditional understanding of the nature of Scripture.” My argument here is that the tone of Carson’s review is overly combative and defensive in ways similar to the HTFC’s report and that such a posture is a hallmark of inerrantists.

### §3.3.3. Reviewing I&I: G.K. Beale

Educated at Southern Methodist University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and the University of Cambridge, Gregory K. Beale has taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Wheaton College, and as of 2010, WTS.<sup>53</sup> Like Carson, Beale has a problem with Enns’ use of the term “myth” when discussing Scripture. Unlike Carson, though, Beale directly confronts Enns over the notion of biblical inerrancy.

For Beale, the chief concern with Enns’ I&I is that his project is actually anything but traditional. He makes this point clear in the closing line of his first paragraph when he writes “Scholars and students alike should be grateful that Enns has boldly ventured to set before his evangelical peers a view of inspiration and hermeneutics that has not *traditionally* been held by evangelical scholarship.”<sup>54</sup> Near the close of his introduction,

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<sup>52</sup> Notable recent examples include Meredith Kline and John Walton.

<sup>53</sup> At WTS, Beale is not only a professor of NT but he is also professor of Biblical Theology. Prior to Beale’s arrival, WTS’s professor of Biblical Theology was Peter Enns.

<sup>54</sup> G.K. Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration: A Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation* by Peter Enns.” *JETS* 49.2 (June 2006), 287. (my emphasis) Enns offers a rejoinder to Beale’s review and Beale offers a surrejoinder to Enns’ comments, but since neither of these articles were part of the HTFC’s report, I will not include them in my discussion here. See Peter Enns, “Response to G.K. Beale’s Review

Beale also acknowledges the innovative character of I&I, writing that, “Enns says his thesis is not novelty, but, in reality, the main proposal for which he contends throughout is ‘novel’: he is trying to produce a synthesis of the findings of mainline liberal scholarship and an evangelical view of Scripture.”<sup>55</sup>

A number of important word choices are present in Beale’s opening statements that need to be discussed. Firstly, Beale immediately puts Enns’ position outside of “traditional” evangelical scholarship. Secondly, Beale refers to what Enns simply calls scholarship as “mainline liberal scholarship.” And finally, Beale put this “scholarship” in juxtaposition with “an evangelical view of Scripture.” According to Beale, it seem fairly clear from the outset what Enns is actually doing in I&I, namely, he is attempting a type of reconciliation between traditional evangelical views of Scripture and what mainline liberal scholars contend Scripture is. Not only is this a couching of I&I in the liberal-conservative dichotomy that Enns argues at length against, but it is also appeals to tropes of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s, creating a dynamic of clearly defined camps arguing over what, exactly, Scripture *is*.

It might appear that I have overblown Beale’s usage of the terms “traditional” and “liberal” to make my case for something that Beale does not intent to make. However, in 2008, Beale collected his journal reviews of Enns and published them in his *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*. In the introduction to this work, he presents a not so fictitious discussion between two biblical scholars he names Traditionalist Tom and Progressive Pat.

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Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation*.” *JETS* 49.2 (June 2006): 313-326, and G.K. Beale, “A Surrejoinder to Peter Enns’ Response to G.K. Beale’s *JETS* Article of His Book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*.” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 16-36.

<sup>55</sup> Beale, “Myth,” 288.

As one can imagine, while Pat seeks to replace the doctrine of inerrancy because it is an “outdated statement for twenty-first-century evangelicals” with something that accords with what “postmodernism has taught us,”<sup>56</sup> Tom desires to remain with the “standard ‘evangelical’ meaning of the authority of Scripture” as expressed in the “1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.”<sup>57</sup> Beale’s six page introductory dialogue sets the stage for the aim of his book, which decries the fact that there “is afoot an attempt to redefine what is ‘an evangelical view of scriptural authority.’”<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, then, for Beale, I&I represents another watershed moment in evangelicalism over the question of Scriptural authority, and so the idea of casting Enns in terms of the traditional-liberal divide makes sense. After all, it is important to note what actually prompted Beale to write his review of I&I. On January 30, 2009, Beale gave an interview to the Reformed Forum’s audio program *Christ the Center*. In this interview, he discussed that what persuaded him to write a response to Enns was that he attended an annual scholarly meeting where Enns’ book was being discussed. What he found at this meeting was that the reviewer of Enns’ text generally looked favorably upon I&I. While he never disclosed the name of either the meeting or the scholar approving of Enns’ work, he does relay that this event was the catalyst that propelled him to respond to Enns because it indicated to Beale a serious shift in the understanding of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Beale, *Erosion*, 13, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>59</sup> The interview is available online at: <http://reformedforum.org/podcasts/ctc54/>. Beale also discusses this in *Erosion*, 22.

For Beale, a part of this shift can be seen in I&I's positive approach to the usage of "myth" to describe portions of the OT. In considering supposed ANE mythical parallels to the OT, Beale lays out four possible connections, but he contends that Enns never fully aligns with any of them.<sup>60</sup> Instead, what Enns appears to be saying is that "the biblical writers absorbed mythical worldviews unconsciously, reproduced them in their writings, and believed them to be reliable descriptions of the real world and events occurring in the past real world."<sup>61</sup> Such a position clearly undercuts the doctrine of biblical inerrancy by attributing to the biblical authors fanciful stories they presented as "fact" but were, in actuality, erroneous. Ultimately, Beale's entire claim for this reading of Enns rests on one sentence in Enns' forty-seven page chapter where Enns' writes "So, stories were *made up* that aimed at answering questions of ultimate meaning."<sup>62</sup> Since Beale attributes the notion of made up stories as part of Enns' definition of myth, and since Enns' contextualizes at least part of the OT in the genre of myth, Beale concludes that, for Enns, at least some of the biblical authors reproduced made up stories about what they took to be the actual history of the events they were describing. After all, as Beale points out, Enns says "The biblical account, along with its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, assumes the factual nature of what it reports."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> These connections are as follows: (1) similarities between ANE myths and OT parallels are due to the polemical intentions of the biblical authors; (2) parallels represent general revelation to both ANE and biblical authors, though it is only properly interpreted by the latter; (3) a notion of a single source of revelation predating both ANE and biblical authors which was garbled by the ANE authors but properly witnessed by the biblical writers; and (4) ANE concepts are not counter but used in productive ways by biblical authors, though such ways are revised by special revelation. See Beale, "Myth," 289-290.

<sup>61</sup> Beale, "Myth," 290.

<sup>62</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 41. (my emphasis)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



For Beale, Enns has given too much ground to pagan mythology and as a result the historicity of the biblical writings is called into question.<sup>64</sup> However, such a criticism is dependent on reading all biblical writing through a modern historical lens. For Enns, what Genesis 1 fundamentally describes is that “Yahweh, the God of Israel, is worthy of worship.”<sup>65</sup> For Beale, however, what Genesis 1 reports is “history as we would understand it as ‘events that happened,’ and which correspond to past reality.”<sup>66</sup> It is important to note here that Beale makes it explicit that he is talking about the writings of *all* of the biblical authors here, not simply just the author(s) of Genesis.

The relationship between the mythical and the historical is a vital part of Beale’s critique of Enns. For Beale, the “problem with Enns’ view is that what appears to be historical genre (compared with other accepted historical genres later in the OT), [Enns] sees to be ultimately mythical.”<sup>67</sup> I take Beale to mean here that primeval history of Genesis 1-11 is “history” in the same way that, say, the Historical books of the Bible (e.g. Joshua or 1 Samuel) are “history.” Beale chides Enns for “not telling us the grounds upon which one can decide what parts of OT history are historically true and which are not.”<sup>68</sup> Beale’s argument for this seems to be that since Enns acknowledges that there is an accurate degree of historical reporting in places in the OT (i.e. during the monarchic period (1000-600 B.C.E.)), can we not simply make this assertion for the entirety of the historical writings in the OT? Enns dismisses such a claim by arguing that we simply do

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<sup>64</sup> Beale, “Myth,” 293, 295.

<sup>65</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Beale, “Myth,” 295.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

not have the extrabiblical evidence to corroborate such a claim for the earlier portions of the OT, namely, the primeval history of Genesis 1-11. Beale objects to such a notion on the grounds that there is the possibility of mythical traditions in circulation around the time of the monarchic period that would cast doubt on the veracity of this history. It is important to note here that Beale is talking about possibilities, not actual extant extrabiblical material. Enns, however, is restricting his discussion to the actual materials we have; in addition, it is clear from the trajectory of Enns' own thinking that if such extrabiblical evidence was produced that Enns would be open to altering his view of the historicity of the material produced during the monarchic period.

In addition, as Enns clearly states, what appears to be history even in the Historical Books might not, in actuality, be history; rather, it might be historiography.<sup>69</sup> For Beale's account of OT history to be substantiated, he needs to be forthcoming as to which books he considers represent OT history and when "history" is being recorded in the OT as events that happened instead of events that are being interpreted. For example, are the books of Proverbs, Job, and Jonah considered to have elements of OT history? Is all of Joshua "history" in Beale's sense of the term? What about Chronicles? If Beale is asserting that Genesis 1 is "historically true," with regard to a reporting of events that happened in the past, but the book of Jonah is not, then one needs an argument from Beale for why such a reading of these texts in this manner is warranted, and, specifically, why Genesis 1 *must* be read as being essentially historical. It is one thing to raise the

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<sup>69</sup> As Enns states in I&I, "All historiography is a literary product, which means it is about people writing down (or transmitting orally) their *version* of that history. In other words, historiography is by definition an interpretive exercise." (61) While Beale acknowledges the interpretation of events in historical accounts, he does not think that this fundamentally distorts the historicity of these events, at least not in the case of the biblical authors. Yet, reporting events that happened and retelling events in a way that serves a specific purpose are two very different things. Beale seems to opt for *all* "history" in the OT to be the former, while Enns nuances this view with an acknowledgment of the latter.

possibility of reading Genesis as essentially historical and quite another to demonstrate that such a reading is not only viable but also preferable to other readings. The onus is on Beale, not Enns, for why one should infer the latter from the former.

Beale is quite correct, though, in his assertion that Enns is ambiguous about how he sees the relationship between the historical and the mythical. Like Beale, I have been operating under the presumption that Enns does not see much of a connection between the two because Enns does not discuss this relationship in any meaningful fashion. If we are wrong in our presumptions, though, that is only because Enns has not made himself clear about this relationship. Due to Beale's commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy, one would suspect that Beale is much more invested in the question of the historicity of the creation and flood narratives than Enns is. While Enns never directly mentions inerrancy as one of the evangelical doctrines he believes needs to be adjusted, I argue that it is clear that this doctrine is exactly what Enns has in mind as his target and Beale is certainly right to question why Enns does not confront the notion directly.<sup>70</sup>

For Beale, the battle over the doctrine of inerrancy is brought sharply into focus with Enns' use of the incarnational model of Scripture. Like Carson and the HTFC, Beale contends that Enns greatly suffers from a lack of precision in explaining just how the incarnational analogy works in Scripture. For example, if the humanness of Scriptures results in "errors" then does that mean the same is true for the humanness of Jesus? Also, what is the exact relationship between the divine and human attributes of the incarnation that Enns thinks can serve as a pattern for understanding Scripture? For example, with respect to Enns' discussion of the diversity found within the OT, Beale writes, "This is

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<sup>70</sup> Beale, "Myth," 300.

another example of using his view of Christ's incarnation without defining the view (it would seem that his definition implies that Christ made mistakes of e.g. a mathematical or historical nature, but that he was reliable in his moral and theological statements).”<sup>71</sup>

Carson also has a rather lengthy comment to this effect in his review at the very beginning of his critique of Enns. The point for both Carson and Beale is that Enns' overemphasis on the humanity of the Bible discounts the essentially divine nature of Scripture.

Enns is aware of the limitations of his incarnational analogy, though. He writes,

I only mean that the incarnate written word (Scripture) is, like Christ, beyond our ability to grasp exhaustively; we can speak on the incarnate Christ meaningfully but never fully. We should not think that the Bible, expressed as it is in the more tangible, controllable medium of human language, is any less mysterious. This is why the incarnational analogy is problematic on at least one level. The purpose of an analogy is to explain a lesser-known thing by using something better known.

But the incarnation of Christ is itself precisely what needs explaining.<sup>72</sup>

Beale never discusses the mysterious aspects of either the incarnation or divine inspiration of Scripture in his review of *I&I*. While Enns makes a number of caveats toward the mysterious, this kind of tentative language is found nowhere in Beale's review. One gets the impression that, for Beale, the problems and questions raised by Enns have already been asked and answered within evangelicalism and Enns is either just not paying proper heed to these answers or he is placing undue emphasis on problems that are, in actuality, not really problems for evangelicals. At the end of his review, Beale

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<sup>71</sup> Beale, “Myth,” 300.

<sup>72</sup> Enns, *I&I*, 168.

lists eight points that summarize his critique of Enns and his last two points illustrate well this type of asked and answered mentality. Beale writes,

(7) Enns does not attempt to present to *and* discuss for the reader significant alternative viewpoints other than his own, which is needed in a book dealing with such crucial issues.

(8) Enns appears to caricature the views of past evangelical scholarship by not distinguishing the views of so-called fundamentalists from that of good conservative scholarly work.<sup>73</sup>

In addition, in his surrejoinder to Enns, Beale says that “this is the very nub of the problem: many, if not most, evangelical scholars, I dare say, do not consider the difficulties [presented by Enns] as problematic as does Enns.”<sup>74</sup> I take from these statements the notion that, for Beale, Enns has failed to both consider the weight of the answers given by “good conservative scholars” and demonstrate why, in fact, the problems he has identified, say the ANE context of Scripture, really represent a problem for a traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture, i.e. one built upon the notion of biblical inerrancy.

While Beale is certainly the least militant of the three reviews I considered in this chapter, he is, like Carson and the HTFC, committed to preserving a traditional evangelical doctrine of Scripture, a doctrine that he considers to be under threat. I mentioned this in my introduction, but it is important to discuss this again at length.

Beale writes in *Erosion* that,

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<sup>73</sup> Beale, “Myth,” 311. The scholars Beale has in mind here include Kenneth Kitchen, Meredith Kline, Daniel Block, John Walton, and Richard Hess to name only a few.

<sup>74</sup> Beale, “Surrejoinder,” 20.

What has happened in the last thirty years to cause such a desire to revise what had been considered the standard North American evangelical statement on Scripture [i.e. the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy?]? I think it is safe to say that, at least, two things have contributed significantly to this reassessment. First, the onset of postmodernism in evangelicalism has caused less confidence in the propositional claims of the Bible...A second factor...is that over the last twenty-five years there has been an increasing number of conservative students graduating with doctorates in biblical studies and theology from non-evangelical institutions.”<sup>75</sup>

Beale never offers a definition of postmodernism, but argues that such a position undercuts the notion of statements in the Bible that describe a reality that is either true or false (i.e. propositions).

His second claim is actually targeted more at American institutions than it is at necessarily non-evangelical institutions. After all, one should be hesitant in describing British universities like Oxford or Cambridge as evangelical institutions, yet Beale appears to have no problem with such institutions. Beale’s true “institutional” concern is that a “significant percentage of these graduates have assimilated to one degree or another non-evangelical perspectives, especially with regard to higher critical views of the authorship, dating, and historical claims of the Bible.”<sup>76</sup> Given that Beale offers absolutely no empirical evidence to substantiate this claim, it is hard to evaluate the authenticity of his statement; however, it is true that while critical scholarship can be thoroughly avoided at universities like St. Andrews, Oxford, and Cambridge, such

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<sup>75</sup> Beale, *Erosion*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

avoidance is impossible at places like Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, and perhaps what Beale is noting are the results of a forced engagement with critical scholarship within evangelicalism over the past quarter century.

While I argue that Carson and the HTFC hold to a similar position, Beale is explicit in his writings that such a doctrine of Scripture is best expressed through the language of biblical inerrancy.<sup>77</sup> For Beale, this language is best articulated through the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, and, therefore, it is to an examination of some of the specific provisions in the Chicago Statement that we must turn to in order to see what kind of evangelical traditioning Beale et al are endorsing.

### **§3.4. Defending Inerrancy in Evangelical Traditioning**

I argue in this section that unlike my notion of Ennsian traditioning, which consists of conversation, humility, and patience, the conception of traditioning being offered by inerrantists like Beale is organized around the twin goals of insulation and a defense of orthodoxy. It must be stated here emphatically that I see nothing wrong with the idea of defending one's faith commitments, per se. However, the defensive posture I want to associate with inerrantists' defense of "orthodoxy" is found in its aggressiveness to those who dissent from a given commitment and a refusal to fully engage with material that challenges one said commitment(s). For example, ardently dismissing someone or a piece of evidence at the outset simply because it may challenge your commitment(s).

In order to demonstrate my claim, I want to consider two of the articles from the

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<sup>77</sup> Though elements of this position exist in his review, pp. 300-306, this position is definitively made in his book *Erosion*, which, again, is a reworking of his journal reviews of I&I. Appendix 2 in *Erosion* is the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in full. See pp. 267-279.

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (Articles XII and XIX), asking of each article how it establishes the parameters of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and what the resulting notion of traditioning might look like with respect to this doctrinal understanding. Article XII state:

**Article XII: Inerrancy of the Whole**

*WE AFFIRM* that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. *WE DENY* that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.<sup>78</sup>

Article XII's framing of inerrancy in negative terms, free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit is important because, as R.C. Sproul notes, it establishes "parameters beyond which we may not move, boundaries we may not transgress."<sup>79</sup> It is also important to note that such parameters extend to *all* the teachings and assertions of the Bible, and that these teachings cannot be restricted to matters solely of spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes. Again, as Sproul says, "The Bible does have something to say about the origin of the earth, about the advent of man, about creation, and about such matter that have scientific import, as the question of the flood."<sup>80</sup>

This does not mean that we necessarily have all the teachings and assertions from the

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<sup>78</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*. (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1996), 36.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 37.



Bible worked out, though. What this means is that whatever the Bible actually teaches, say, on the matter of creation, cannot be overturned by extrabiblical sources (i.e. what Sproul refers to as “secular theories.”<sup>81</sup>) In this way, then, it is possible for one to hold to the Chicago Statement and deny that the Bible teaches anything about the material origins of the universe. Since the Bible is silent on this matter, whatever we might discover about these origins does not conflict with the Bible’s actual teaching on origins.<sup>82</sup>

Also, as Sproul explains with his example of Galileo, it is possible for us to draw erroneous inferences about what the Bible actually teaches. As he states, “To say that science cannot overturn the teaching of Scripture is not to say that science cannot aid the church in understanding Scripture, or even correct false inferences drawn from Scripture or actual misinterpretations of the Scripture.” What we cannot do, however, is force the Bible into conformity with “secular theories”; rather, it is the Bible’s teachings themselves that inform us of the truth of everything they assert, and while science can help us understand these truths, it can never vitiate them.<sup>83</sup>

How does such an understanding of this article help us view the parameters of an inerrantist approach to traditioning? We begin with the notion that whatever is perceived to be a “falsehood” in any of areas in which the Bible speaks is not actually a falsehood. Therefore, if the Bible teaches that Adam was an actual historical person, then Adam

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<sup>81</sup> Sproul, *Explaining*, 38. Note the combative and dismissive language that is being used in this passage.

<sup>82</sup> Again, as I have alluded to earlier, Meredith Kline and John Walton are both proponents of just such a view.

<sup>83</sup> Sproul, *Explaining*, 38. It is clear that both in the Chicago Statement and in Beale’s writings that the idea of biblical truth is understood in terms of the correspondence theory which puts added pressure on biblical statements which appear to be historical to be read as history.

must be historical, regardless of what advances in evolutionary biology say about the origin of mankind. In addition, if the Bible teaches that the universe was created in six twenty-four hour days, then the universe was literally created in six twenty-four hour days, regardless of what cosmologists say about the creation of the universe. The issue here for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture is that the Chicago Statement explicitly classifies the teachings of the Bible in terms of history and science, ergo, making the Bible a history and scientific textbook, claiming that it does, it fact, teach, and teach without falsehood, in all of these areas. Since the truth of the Biblical account is insulated from any extrabiblical challenges, it becomes paramount that one steadfastly defends these biblical truths from the onslaught of “secular theories.”

Part of the notion of traditioning as expressed in the Chicago Statement is that the Bible is the sole source of truth, not simply in religious matters, but also in terms of history and science upon which it distinctly teaches. What this means then is that evangelicals need to simultaneously determine what it is that the Bible teaches about matters apart from religion and defend such positions as true statements against detractors because challenges to the authority of biblical science or biblical history are ultimately challenges to the authority of the Bible itself.

#### **Article XIX: Health of the Church**

*WE AFFIRM* that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. *WE DENY* that such confession is necessary for salvation.

However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave

consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.<sup>84</sup>

Article XIX places the doctrine of biblical inerrancy firmly in the life of the faithful Christian. As Sproul states, the “article is affirming that the confession is not limited to doctrinal concern for theological purity but originates in a profound concern that the Bible remain the authority for the living out of the Christian life...A strong doctrine of the authority of Scripture should, when properly implemented, lead a person to a greater degree of conformity to that Word he espouses as true.”<sup>85</sup> The denial in XIX is telling, for while assent to the doctrine of inerrancy is neither necessary for salvation nor a solitary means for achieving sanctification, there “is all too often a close relationship between rejection of inerrancy and subsequent defections from matter [sic] of the Christian faith that are essential to salvation.”<sup>86</sup>

What this means for an inerrantist approach to traditioning is that inerrancy serves not only as the line that keeps one moored to the authority of Scripture, but that releasing the line of inerrancy is bound to lead one adrift in the dangerous waters of soteriological uncertainty. Such a position only amplifies the need for an urgent and thorough traditioning within the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Such a traditioning not only insulates and defends one from potentially serious salvific error, but also helps one to be “brought under the authority of God’s Word, that we may glorify Christ in our lives, individually and corporately as the church.”<sup>87</sup> What is at stake, then, in a traditioning

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<sup>84</sup> Sproul, *Explaining*, 55-56.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>87</sup> Sproul, *Explaining*, 57.

consistent with the Chicago Statement is not just any meaningful sense of evangelical identity, but rather, any meaningful sense of Christian identity, and naturally, such an identity is necessary to vigorously defend.

### **§3.5. Conclusion**

The central focus of this chapter was an expanded discussion of the so-called Peter Enns controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary. Framing this controversy against the backdrop of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s, I scrutinized the HTFC report on I&I by showing how its concerns are principally over the imagined ebbing away of the “Reformed” Bibliology that serves as the theological bedrock of WTS. As I demonstrate, Carson and Beale, who both argue for a more “balanced” treatment of “conservative evangelical scholarship” in the Bible than Enns has provided, also echo this concern over a fading orthodox Bibliology in their reviews of I&I. Of utmost concern for Carson and Beale is the idea that there could be “myth” in the Bible, and such a notion, regardless of how it is nuanced, is unthinkable in orthodoxy. I conclude this chapter by indicating how a careful examination of Articles XII and XIX of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy reveal a form of evangelical traditioning that simultaneously isolates both Scripture and the evangelical from extrabiblical information and requires a defensive posture be taken against all arguments, and even persons, attempting to undermine the inerrantist’s conception of truth. The undertaking that remains for my study is to assess the central question of my study, namely, whether the practice of traditioning I discussed in this chapter results in a process of evangelical traditioning that would be consistent with the conception of pedagogical responsibility I

outlined in my introduction, and I address the central question of my study in my conclusion.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

### §4.1. Introduction

The purpose of my conclusion is to answer the central question of my study: does a commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy produce a pedagogically responsible process of evangelical traditioning? As illustrated through my examinations of the doctrine of inerrancy and the Peter Enns controversy, I am forced to answer my central question in the negative. I argue for this conclusion because the inerrantist conception of traditioning I highlighted in chapter three is inconsistent with the notion of pedagogical responsibility outlined in my introduction.

### §4.2. Inerrantist Traditioning as Pedagogically Irresponsible

Recall that my idea of *pedagogically responsible* consists of two criteria: the question of theological growth and the standard of intellectual honesty. I defined the first criterion in negative terms, arguing that a practice was pedagogically responsible as long as it did not impede theological growth. Yet, as my discussion of Peter Enns explains, there is an increasing number of evangelicals who are discontent with the answers given by inerrantists to the problems they encounter in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> One of the most vocal evangelicals to write revealingly about this issue is Carlos Bovell. Bovell, a graduate of WTS, states that, “over time, insistence upon inerrancy as the *sine qua non* for [evangelical] orthodoxy has bred emotional, spiritual and intellectual dysfunction into

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Enns, two prominent examples include Kenton Sparks and Carlos Bovell; in fact, Bovell has recently edited a collection of essays on the question of inerrancy and evangelical bibliology. See his *Biblical Inspiration and the Authority of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015.)

evangelical churches and institutions, particularly among students.”<sup>2</sup> Bovell is not simply speaking in terms of academic observations, though; he is speaking in terms of his own experience as a student wrestling with the challenges of balancing a commitment to inerrancy alongside the rigors of biblical scholarship. Reflecting on his experience, Bovell writes,

The inerrantist communities I inhabited prided themselves on being spiritual “watchdogs” both socially and institutionally. Not a few believers reckon it their spiritual duty to police biblical scholarship for any and all threats to inerrancy. Although their intention, charitably interpreted, is to minister to others by trying to help them safeguard their faith, a destructive side-effect is the painful stunting of evangelical spiritual growth, particularly for those needing space to ask honest and penetrating questions.<sup>3</sup>

It is just such evangelicals, those in need of breathing room to ask spiritually meaningful questions, that inerrancy does not seem to accommodate. For instance, it is hard to leave much room for questions when one is traditioned to deny “the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship”<sup>4</sup> even though scholarship suggests that not all biblical history is historical in the modern sense of the word and that not all biblical texts can be easily ascribed to their traditional authors. For example, there is nothing in the texts of the four canonical gospels that suggest they were written by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, and to return to my earlier example of

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<sup>2</sup> Carlos Bovell, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), iv.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Bovell, ed., *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), xviii-xix.

<sup>4</sup> Chicago Statement, Article XVIII, denial.

Hazor in Joshua 11:10-11, even if one grants that the Israelites probably did destroy the Canaanite city of Hazor, one still has to acknowledge that, as Amnon Ben-Tor points out, “Biblical historiography, in particular the books of Joshua-Kings, cannot be considered a completely accurate account of the events described in them, because they are motivated by a theological—and to some extent—a political agenda.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the pedagogical imperative to even ask such questions is one that is lacking in the inerrantist model. For instance, in an interview with Martin Downes, G.K. Beale offers the following piece of advice to evangelical students pursuing graduate study in biblical studies at secular universities: “You need to have your beliefs really grounded. You need to know who you are, and why you are that way before you enter into an institution.”<sup>6</sup> The assertion that one’s beliefs about the Bible should be preemptively insulated from the effects of serious academic study of the Bible is simply contrary to any meaningful notion of academy study. Worse yet, it is pedagogically dysfunctional because it forces evangelical students into a theological determinism that suffocates their ability to fully engage with just what it is that they believe and how such beliefs are to be articulated.

According to Bovell, such experiences are amplified at a place like WTS. As Bovell again notes from his experience,

in my church and seminary [WTS] experiences, believers appeared all-too-ready to suddenly withhold the loving and supportive social infrastructure that comes with evangelical community from persons constructively critiquing inerrancy’s

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<sup>5</sup> See Amnon Ben-Tor, “Who Destroyed Canaanite Hazor?” *BAR* Vol. 39, No. 4 (July/August 2013), 36.

<sup>6</sup> “The Word of Truth” in Martin Downes, *Risking the Truth: Interviews on Handling Truth and Error in the Church*. (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2009), 229.



explanatory adequacy...How are students supposed to integrate what they learn in school with what they learn in church if they are constantly being harassed by inerrantism's thought police?"<sup>7</sup>

The cognitive dissonance associated with conflicting commitments to both faith and scholarship is inimical to theological growth. However, it is the logical outgrowth of an educational system that is both dedicated to the pursuit of scholarship but also committed to upholding a preexisting theological position to which the results of said scholarship must conform. It is difficult to see how such an experience could possibly afford one the chance for meaningful theological growth.

The link between growth and experience is an essential one for the study and assessment of a pedagogical practice. Three quarters of a century ago, John Dewey laid out this relationship in his *Experience and Education*. For Dewey, the essential relationship between experience and education has to do with the concept of growth in general. Does an experience foster growth or does it obstruct it? While Dewey deems experiences that foster growth as educative, those that hinder growth he understands to be mis-educative.<sup>8</sup> As Dewey asks, "does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in a new direction?"<sup>9</sup> Clearly, for Bovell and others, inerrantist traditioning shuts off any kind of theological growth a student might gain from engaging

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<sup>7</sup> Bovell, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, xx. Though he doesn't mention him by name, Bovell makes a direct reference to Peter Enns, saying "almost without notice, an admired professor can be forced to resign..." (xx).

<sup>8</sup> See John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (New York: Macmillian Company, 1939), 23-34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29.

seriously with the questions raised by a close and scholarly reading of Scripture. As WTS President Peter Lillaback said of I&I, “We have students who have read it say it has liberated them. We have other students that say it's crushing their faith and removing them from their hope.”<sup>10</sup> Lillaback’s comment illuminates the polarizing nature of the theological either/or produced by a commitment to inerrancy: either one feels confined by its shackles or the foundation of one’s faith is flattened under the weight of its collapse. Neither outcome is compatible with theological growth as, on the one hand, one’s capacity for theological reflection is significantly restricted, and, on the other hand, alternatives to one’s particular theological vision are rendered conceptually untenable.

Moreover, it is difficult to see how through its affirmations and denials the Chicago Statement displays any meaningful sense of intellectual honesty. For example, in Article XVIII, it is affirmed “that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.” However, in the denial of this very same article, which I quoted earlier in this conclusion, it states that what is being denied is “the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.” The harmony between the affirmation and the denial of Article XVIII is difficult to maintain, however, for if one takes seriously, say, the scholarship on literary forms in Genesis 1 in conjunction with the grammatico-historical method then the academic consensus would force one to dehistoricize the text of Genesis 1, classifying it not as historical in the modern sense of the term but rather as an example of myth.

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<sup>10</sup> Pullman, “Westminster Theological Suspension,” online at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/aprilweb-only/114-24.0.html?paging=off>

Sproul's explanation of this article is also suspect when he writes, "Thus, it is important for all biblical interpreters to be aware of the literary forms and grammatical structures that are found within the Scripture. An analysis of these forms is proper and appropriate for any correct interpretation of the text...When the quest for sources produces a dehistoricizing of the Bible, a rejection of its teaching or a rejection of the Bible's own claims of authorship it has trespassed beyond its proper limits."<sup>11</sup>

But as I have previously demonstrated, if we engage deeply with the scholarship called for in the affirmation of this article—the scholarship on literary forms—then it is impossible to see how we are able to responsibly hold to the denial. One is forced to ask then just how seriously we can take this article when its denial appears to deny what its affirmation seems to affirm.<sup>13</sup>

The inconsistencies present in the concrete applications of the doctrine of inerrancy have not gone unnoticed. As Bovell astutely writes discussing his education at WTS, "These biblical scholars, then, found themselves battling for their Bibles with their right hands while they accepted critical conclusions that undermined these very convictions with their left."<sup>12</sup> Couple this with a defensive posture toward anyone who offers even a mild critique of a less than clear doctrine and it becomes impossible to see how this

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<sup>11</sup> Sproul, *Explaining*, 54-55.

<sup>13</sup> One may also probe the same line of questioning in terms of the purported "authorship" of the biblical books. As Karl Van Der Toorn states, "To define the Bible as a collection of books, as implied in the Greek designation *biblia*, is an anachronism. The Bible is a repository of tradition, accumulated over time, that was preserved and studied by a small body of specialists...Books have authors, but the writers of the texts of the [ANE] are, as a rule, anonymous." If we carefully consider Van Der Toorn's statement, though, the question of authorship, even the "Bible's" own statements on authorship are suspect. However, if such conclusions are not permitted by the Chicago Statement, then how, exactly, is one to utilize the methodologies it is calling for at the start? See Karl Van Der Toorn, *Scribal Culture: The Making of the Hebrew Bible*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Carlos R. Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 30.

inerrantist form of traditioning could promote theological growth or count as being intellectually honest.

Finally, it is questionable that the doctrine of inerrancy as presented in the Chicago Statement is actually a product of Scripture interpreting Scripture. As stated in the affirmation of Article XV, “*WE AFFIRM* that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.” However, even the ESV—the preferred biblical translation of a number of evangelicals—says this in its footnote to 2 Tim 3:16: “All Scripture [πᾶσα γραφή] would refer first to the [Old Testament] but by implication also to at least some [New Testament] writings, which by this time were already being considered as Scripture.” Three important notes should be made about this footnote.

Firstly, the footnote’s emphasis on “implication” moves the discussion of inspiration in the New Testament from textual exegesis to the individual activity of interpretation. Secondly, its vaguely worded contention “at least some [New Testament] writings” does not necessarily extend inspiration to all of the writings that would ultimately go on to comprise the New Testament. And finally, even when limited, the assertion that “by this time were already being considered as Scripture” is viewed as suspect by notable evangelical biblical scholars. As Lee Martin McDonald points out, it was not the first-century authors, but rather the second-century church that began to transfer the authority of the teachings of Jesus to the actual written documents—documents which included the writings of Paul. Therefore, the idea that at the time of composition documents like 1 or 2 Timothy or 2 Peter would have been ubiquitously imbued with the status of Scripture is simply anachronistic.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), 280, See also pp. 243-284.

When the above criticisms are taken in toto, it cannot function in a pedagogically responsible fashion. Again, as Bovell nicely states, “As a result of my college and seminary education, I had come to a place where I needed to re-formulate the doctrine [of inerrancy] from scratch, ‘from the Bible,’ as it were. I was astonished to find I could not credibly do so. In fact without the support of the inerrantist culture taken for granted, the doctrine lost all plausibility.”<sup>14</sup> As I argued in chapter two as well, Enns cautions us to let the Bible speak for the Bible and not try to force what the Bible says into any of our preconceived ideas of what it must say as the word of God. As I have demonstrated in my discussion, it appears as if the doctrine of inerrancy as articulated in the Chicago Statement is functions solely as a hermeneutical construct designed to force a particular interpretation on Scripture rather than an exegetical principle for explicating what Scripture actually might say, and as a result, use of the doctrine of inerrancy as a tool for traditioning evangelicals suppresses one’s theological growth and betrays any semblance of intellectual honesty.

#### **§4.3. Conclusion**

As I have argued in this study, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy serves as an inappropriate basis for evangelical traditioning. Furthermore, inerrancy, as illustrated through the Chicago Statement, serves as an improper foundation for evangelical Biblilology. Does this mean the Ennsian incarnational model serves as a better foundation? In an important sense, yes; what Enns does very well is that he takes the humanity associated with the production of Scripture very seriously. This is a requisite

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<sup>14</sup> Bovell, *Rehabilitating*, vi.

component for any responsible Biblilology, and likewise, any responsible account of traditioning. While Enns has neither formulated all the robust components of a comprehensive evangelical Biblilology nor a thorough account of the particulars of evangelical traditioning, he has given us a more adequate foothold from which to begin detailed work on these important projects than that provided by the doctrine of inerrancy.

While the focus of my study has been on the doctrine of inerrancy, I want to again emphasize the recognition that there is possibly a tension between theological traditioning of any sort and my conception of pedagogical responsibility. Requiring space in theological education for students at any level to have room for theological growth and insisting on intellectual honesty in all theological matters would undoubtedly affect the manner in which a number of traditions approach their pedagogical activities. However, I can see no way around requiring all forms of traditioning to be conducted in some approach consistent with my notion of pedagogical responsibility, even if this means that various forms of traditioning, or even entire traditions themselves, are deemed pedagogically irresponsible.

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